

December 27, 2015: [DEMONS]

The recent Oklahoma State University homecoming incident spawned this sermon. You might recall that incident where a 25-year-old woman inexplicably drove her car into a crowd of parade-watchers, killing 4 and wounding almost 50. That is just one of dozens of events in recent years where people are left scratching their heads, asking “why did this happen?” At first they thought the driver was intoxicated; but soon it was revealed that she had mental health issues going back for years. The same thing has happened over and over. Las Vegas last week is a recent example. How many times have we heard parents, friends and associates of these perpetrators say things like “he was a good person”, “we have no idea why this happened”, “this comes as a total surprise to us”, and so on?

In the wake of the OSU incident, I was asked: “Is there anything in the Bible that suggests there will be an uptick in demons in the last days?” I immediately answered: “There is language in the Revelation suggesting that.” What, in fact, immediately came to mind was that passage concerning locusts that has intrigued me since I was young. So I went and read it again, and here it is from Revelation Chapter 9:

1 And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.

2 And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

3 And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.

4 And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.

5 And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man.

6 And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.

7 And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men.

8 And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions.

9 And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.

10 And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.

11 And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.

Now, as I say, this is a Bible passage that has long captivated me, and I struggled to understand it. But these ongoing events around us every day – and perhaps a bit of spiritual maturity – gives me reason to believe I have a better grasp of what these words tell us.

Let's approach this verse by verse.

First Verse: And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.

This "star" is likely Satan. Isaiah 14:12 says **How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!** "O Lucifer" would be better translated "O day star." Thus, the identification of Satan in this verse is probably accurate. Isaiah foresaw this development in the same manner described by John.

This is a status change for Satan. No longer is he positioned where he can present himself before God (Job 1:6), but he is now banished to earth. And he brings with him now the "key of the bottomless pit" which has of late been given to him.

Second Verse: And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

Demons are the power of darkness; hell is the place of darkness. Satan carries on his designs by blinding the eyes of men, by extinguishing light and knowledge, and promoting ignorance and error. And remember, the devil is able to do this by permission from God, who gave him the key to this bottomless pit.

Just like physical smoke surely will obscure the sun and diminish light, in the spiritual world this smoke will diminish and obfuscate light. This smoke represents hoards of demons; here they come to deceive and destroy. They have such a vicious nature that God has heretofore bound them to preserve the human race, but now the restraints are off. Listen to what one commentator says:

If any religious activity is still going on at this time, there will be a flood of false doctrine and defaming of the Lord Jesus Christ. It would be a kind of religion of the flesh (anything goes religion).

Does that sound familiar?

Rest assured, though, none of this operates to obscure or eclipse that “marvelous light” referenced in 1 Peter 2:9, which light is reserved for the Lord’s “peculiar people.”

Third Verse: And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.

In a word, these swarming “locusts” are demons that are given physical forms in order to manifest their destruction and torment. As we proceed here, we will get into the various physical attributes of these locusts and what those attributes tell us. For now, this verse tells us where these demons come from and that they are potent. They play for real! But their hurt is primarily a spiritual hurt. And their reach is limited; they don’t have access to every person then living, as we will next see.

Fourth Verse: And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.

These creatures have orders not to hurt the earth's vegetation or the Lord's people. Clearly, then, these are not real locusts, as we understand that term. Real locusts would eat every green thing that they could find. But these critters are likened to locusts because of their pervasive, congregating, teeming and consuming nature.

These creatures cannot kill the body; but they can inflict "hurt." Consider what Matthew Henry has to say here:

The hurt they were to do them was not a bodily, but a spiritual hurt. They should not in a military way destroy all by fire and sword; the trees and the grass should be untouched, and those they hurt should not be slain; it should not be a persecution, but a secret poison and infection in their souls, which should rob them of their purity, and afterwards of their peace.

Fifth Verse: And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man.

This is the second time in three verses we read of the scorpion. Let's take a brief look at the scorpion. Scorpions are predatory. They have eight legs, and are easily recognized by their pair of grasping pedipalps (a fancy word for stretched out legs) and segmented, curving tail that ends with a venomous stinger. The scorpion's venom is fast-acting and paralyzes the prey. Such is the great spiritual power of these destructive beings. They cause terrible suffering.

As to the sting of a scorpion ("when he striketh a man"), scorpions are a member of the Arachnida class and are closely related to spiders, ticks and mites. The sting is painful and can be lethal to humans, especially infants, children and the elderly. Symptoms of the

bite include tingling, numbness and/or a burning sensation; and in more severe cases a thick tongue, seizures, blurred vision, roving eye movements and difficulty breathing.

Verse 5 also tells us the power given to these factors for hell is limited in time: five months – a certain season but a short season. But though it is to be a short period, it will be very sharp and malignant, albeit short of deadly, as we will now see.

Sixth Verse: And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.

Humans impacted by these locusts/demons will experience such mental anguish and distress that they want to die, and will actually seek death but sweet death evades them. Death, to them, would be a welcome relief. These forces of evil turned loose and unrestrained upon the earth will be so terrible that men will beg to die but will be unable to. We see that all around us today in the many perpetrators of these regularly unfolding violent events. A current CNN special on the heroin plague features a very normal looking young man who explains he used heroin because he just wanted to escape from his feelings and his anxieties.

Seventh Verse: And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men.

In this and following verses, we begin reading of physical characteristics of these locusts that will serve to give us a fuller understanding of what they are all about and the extent of their reach. Obviously, real live locusts as we have come to know them don't go around wearing crowns and looking like battle-ready horses. What we have here, instead, is a symbolic narrative text, or language that is allegorical. ("Allegory" is defined as "a representation of an abstract or spiritual meaning through concrete or material forms.")

John here describes the locusts (demons) as he gives a detailed description of their appearance in his vision.

By “horses prepared unto battle”, we see they are strong, monstrous in size and shape and equipped for action. They pretend to great authority, as suggested by the “crowns like gold” (not real gold, but fools’ gold). They, in truth, answer to a counterfeit authority. “Faces of men” suggests they are intelligent and rational beings, with a show of wisdom and sagacity.

Eighth Verse: And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions.

The descriptive narrative continues with this verse.

What means this “hair of women” comparison? I suggest this: These beings have all the allurements of seeming beauty, useful in ensnaring and defiling the minds of men, yet they present with the tenderness of women. In reality, though, they have the “teeth of lions” and are thus fierce, powerful and cruel creatures.

Ninth Verse: And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.

This ongoing narrative of physical characteristics additionally teaches us about these locusts:

- They have the defense and protection of earthly powers (“breastplate of iron”); and,
- They make a mighty noise in the world; they fly about from one country to another; indeed one continent to another. They are a constantly moving army.

And what about that noise they make? Do we not hear that daily on the television news and the social media? Does not that noise at times virtually drown out all other

messages and activities going on around us? In a very real sense, we are surrounded by this noise during most of our waking hours.

Tenth Verse: And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.

Now we are back to these stinging scorpions. I refer you to my earlier remarks on this point. But take note that the Bible emphasizes this aspect of these demons; scorpions, their stings, their power and the “five months” duration are repetitive themes. When a person is bit by one of these demon creatures, they are bit for real and they stay bit. Moreover, they know they’ve been stung and everybody around them knows it!

Eleventh Verse: And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.

Here we learn a bit more of the locusts’ leader -- their king. This is who they follow, worship and learn from. The king and commander of this hellish squadron is here described. He once was an angel, but is now a fallen angel. He has fallen into the bottomless pit, a huge locale, from which there is no escape or recovery. He is the ruler of this infernal region, and he has the power of darkness under his rule and command. He is a destroyer (Abaddon/Apollyon), for that is his design, his business and his employment, to which he diligently attends and in which he is very successful. It is about this destroying work that he sends forth his emissaries and armies of demons. He is Satan.

Now, the Bible has other instances where demons are present and actually possess people. See, e.g. Matthew 4:23-24 (Jesus healed **those which were possessed with devils**), Matthew 8:28, *et seq.* (**two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way**); and, Mark 9:17-20 (He which hath a **dumb spirit** which **spirit tare him**). There is this poignant story found in Matthew

17:

¹⁴ And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying,

¹⁵ Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.

¹⁶ And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.

¹⁷ Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me.

¹⁸ And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour.

¹⁹ Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out?

²⁰ And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

²¹ Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

But, we must ever remember that the saints of God are free from the sway of these terrible creatures. For example: **Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.** (Luke 10:19, 20).

I love you. Amen!