

Abaddon / Apollyon

Named Angels · Biblical Angels

Revelation 9:11 introduces one of Scripture's most enigmatic figures: '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.' This being appears solely in John's apocalyptic vision during the fifth trumpet judgment, ruling over demonic locusts that emerge from the abyss to torment earth's inhabitants. The bilingual identification—providing both Hebrew (אַבָּדָן, Abaddon) and Greek (Ἀπολλύων, Apollyon) names—emphasizes the universal scope of this figure's malevolent authority, transcending ethnic and linguistic boundaries. Both names derive from roots meaning 'destruction' or 'ruin,' characterizing this being's essential nature and function.

In the Old Testament, Abaddon appears personified as a place or realm associated with death and the grave, paired with Sheol in poetic parallelism. Job 26:6 declares, 'Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering'—here 'destruction' translates Abaddon. Proverbs 15:11 similarly states, 'Hell and destruction are before the LORD'—nothing escapes divine knowledge, not even death's darkest recesses. Psalm 88:11 questions whether God's wonders shall be declared in the grave or His faithfulness in Abaddon, treating it as the realm of the dead beyond human experience.

Note: The transition from Abaddon as a place (OT usage) to the angel of the abyss (Revelation 9:11) parallels similar personifications in Scripture. Death and Hades appear as entities in Revelation 6:8 and 20:13-14. Whether Abaddon represents a distinct angelic being or another name for Satan himself divides interpreters. Arguments for identification with Satan include: (1) Satan is elsewhere called 'the destroyer' (1 Corinthians 10:10, though some texts attribute this to Christ); (2) the abyss serves as Satan's temporary prison (Revelation 20:1-3); (3) demonic forces naturally answer to their chief. Arguments against: (1) Scripture typically names Satan explicitly; (2) the abyss contains fallen angels

(2 Peter 2:4), suggesting Abaddon might be one of these; (3) God may employ a specific angel to execute this particular judgment.

Revelation 9:1-11 describes the context of Abaddon's appearance. The fifth trumpet sounds, and John beholds a star fallen from heaven to earth, given the key to the bottomless pit. This star likely represents a fallen angelic being entrusted with opening the abyss—whether Satan himself or another fallen angel remains debated. Smoke ascends from the opened pit like the smoke of a great furnace, darkening sun and air. From this smoke emerge locusts with power like scorpions, commanded to torment those men lacking God's seal on their foreheads for five months. The torment proves so severe that men shall seek death and not find it, desiring to die yet death fleeing from them.

These locusts bear supernatural characteristics defying natural explanation: they possess shapes like horses prepared for battle, wear crowns of gold, display faces like men's faces, have hair like women's hair, possess teeth like lions' teeth, wear breastplates of iron, and generate sounds like chariots rushing to battle. This grotesque imagery symbolizes the demonic horde's terrifying power, combining human intelligence, martial strength, bestial ferocity, and irresistible force. Over this dreadful swarm reigns Abaddon, their appointed king.

The identification of Abaddon as 'the angel of the bottomless pit' raises interpretive questions regarding his nature and relationship to other biblical figures. Three primary views exist: First, some identify Abaddon directly with Satan, noting that Revelation 20:1-3 describes Satan's binding in the abyss. The destroyer's role aligns with Satan's character as murderer from the beginning (John 8:44) and destroyer of God's creation. Second, others view Abaddon as a distinct fallen angel, perhaps one of the principalities or powers

mentioned in Ephesians 6:12, appointed by divine permission to execute this specific judgment. Third, a minority interpretation suggests Abaddon might be a holy angel executing God's wrath, given that the plague serves divine purposes and the locusts obey God-given restrictions (harming only the unsealed).

Note: The Greek name Apollyon may have carried additional significance for John's original audience. It closely resembles Apollo, the Greco-Roman deity associated with plague and destruction. First-century readers might have recognized an intentional parallel—the true destroyer, not the mythological sun god, rules the abyss. Some scholars detect anti-imperial polemic, as Roman emperors (particularly Domitian) claimed Apollo as patron deity. John's vision subverts such pretensions: Caesar's supposed divine protector is actually the angel of destruction, king over demonic locusts, executing God's judgment on the very empire that claims his protection.

The limited duration of Abaddon's torment—five months—demonstrates divine sovereignty even in judgment. God sets boundaries beyond which evil cannot pass. The locusts receive strict commands: they must not hurt grass, trees, or green things (contrary to natural locusts' behavior), nor may they kill men, only torment them. Even in wrath, God remembers mercy, using suffering to drive the unrepentant toward acknowledgment of their sin and His authority.

Historically, interpreters have drawn various applications from this passage. Preterists sometimes identify the locust plague with first-century historical events, perhaps the Roman-Jewish war or barbarian invasions. Historicists trace Abaddon through church history, variously identifying him with Islam's rise, the Ottoman Empire, or other perceived threats. Futurists view the passage as yet-unfulfilled tribulation prophecy, with Abaddon's emergence awaiting the end times. Idealists see symbolic representation of recurring satanic oppression throughout the church age.

Whatever one's interpretive framework, Abaddon's biblical portrait serves clear purposes: revealing the terrifying reality of demonic forces currently restrained but destined for temporary release; warning of coming judgment upon those who reject God's grace; demonstrating divine sovereignty over even the forces of destruction; and reminding believers that their seal of divine ownership protects them from the destroyer's power. Those who belong to Christ need not fear Abaddon's torment, for they bear the Father's name on their foreheads and rest secure in divine protection.

Key Verses

Job 26:6

Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering.

Proverbs 15:11

Hell and destruction are before the LORD: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?

Proverbs 27:20

Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.

Revelation 9:11

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.

Revelation 9:3-5

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. 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. 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.

Revelation 20:1-3

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

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