

**A SERIES ON REVELATION: is this the end?**  
Week 14 – releasing destruction, hardening hearts

**Transition:** Two weeks ago, we discussed Revelation chapter 8. You may recall, the intense imagery that we had seen in the previous chapters fluidly continues into this chapter. It opens with the Lamb (Jesus) opening the seventh seal, which caused heaven to be silent for half an hour. The silence was broken by an angel who took a golden censer of burning incense, mixed it with the prayers of the saints, added some fire from the altar and then threw the mixture down to earth. The earth then erupted in thunder, rumblings, lightning and an earthquake. Next, four angels blew their trumpet (one at a time), which caused incredible devastation on the earth including the burning up a third of the trees, turning a third of the ocean to blood, killing a third of the creatures in the sea and destroying a third of the ships in the ocean, poisoning a third of the rivers and lakes, and darkening a third of the light from the sun, moon and stars.

**Context:** Chapter 9 opens with the fifth angel blowing his trumpet. We are then introduced to something new...the releasing of things that had been locked in the bottomless pit. When the sixth angel blows his trumpet, four angels that had been bound at the Euphrates River are released. Both of these “releasings” are steeped in mystery...mainly because it is difficult to be conclusive about what any of these things actually are/represent. There’s a decent chance that there may be more questions than answers this week. Regardless, there is still plenty to discuss and apply to our lives today.

**Opening Questions:**

- How can we be reasonably sure that someone has a hard heart? (...what makes it evident?) If you have ever had a hard heart (toward a person or toward God) please share the story, including how you overcame it. What are some consequences of continuing to live with a hardened heart (and not seeking for it to be softened)?
- What are some reasons why God might *allow* suffering? What are some reasons why He might *cause* it? When you’re the one suffering, is there a way to know the difference? ...does it matter to you which it is? Explain.

**Scripture/Storying:** Revelation 9

**Discipleship Questions:**

- There is a lot of imagery used in verses 1-12. Discuss your views on which is to be taken literally and which is figurative. Explain your point of view.
- It appears that the only purpose of these locusts that emerge from the smoke out of the bottomless pit is to cause humans who have not been sealed by God to suffer. (Remember, the pain from their sting is so fierce that people who are stung by them want to die, but they don’t die.) How does that make you feel? At the same time, for those on whom God has placed His seal, they are protected from these creatures. How does that make you feel?
- The king of the locusts is the angel of the bottomless pit, aka Abaddon (Destruction) and Apollyon (Destroyer). Is this the devil? Explain why you think it is or isn’t him.
- Verses 13-21 contain a lot more imagery. Once again, discuss your views on which is literal and which is figurative, and why.
- Notice that the four angels “had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year.” What do you make of this? What meaning (if any) from this can you apply to your own life?
- How do we get idols? What idols have you seen others have? How do idols make people commit sins that hurt those around them? How does idolatry offend God?
- This chapter concludes with the focus on those who had not been killed by the various plagues up to this point. John writes that “they did not repent” of various things. From what did they not repent? In your opinion, why did they not repent?
- Are there people today whom you know that have a hard heart? What can/will you do to reach them with the gospel? Pray for these people as a group.