

“The Abyss as Found Within the Revelation”

The Abyss Defined: By its usage in the New Testament and selected passages in the Old Testament

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First of all, technically speaking, "abussos, abyssos, abyss" is not an OT term, however, the concept (bottomless) of the Greek word "abussos" exists in the Hebrew word "tehome or tehom."

The English word abyss is a transliteration of the Greek word "abussos or abyssos" which literally means "without bottom" hence the KJV translation "bottomless" in certain parts of Revelation. In the Greek documents which we call the New Testament, the Greek word or lexeme "abussos" is only used 9 times -- 7 times in Revelation and once each in Luke and Romans. To make it easy for everyone, literal translations of these verses are transcribed below:

...and they (many demons) were calling on him (Jesus), that he (Jesus) would not command them to go away into the abyss, (Luke 8:31)

...or, 'Who shall go down to the abyss of the grave, (translated "deep" in KJV and others)' that is, to bring Christ up *from the grave* out of the dead. (Romans 10:7)

...and the fifth messenger did sound, and I saw a star which had fallen out of the heaven (in Rev 8:10) to the earth, and there was given to it the key of the shaft of the abyss, (Revelation 9:1)

...and he did open the shaft of the abyss, and there came up a smoke out of the pit as smoke of a great furnace, and darkened was the sun and the air, from the smoke of the pit. (Revelation 9:2)

...and they have over them a king—the messenger of the [abyss](#)—a name to him in Hebrew, Abaddon, and in the Greek he has a name, Apollyon. (Revelation 9:11)

‘...And when they may finish their testimony, the beast that is coming (ascending) up out of the [abyss](#) shall make war with them, and overcome them, and kill them, (Revelation 11:7)

‘...The beast that thou didst see: it was, and it is not; and it is about to come up out of the [abyss](#), and to go away to destruction, and wonder shall those dwelling upon the earth, whose names have not been written upon the scroll of the life from the foundation of the world, beholding the beast that was, and is not, although it is present. (Revelation 17:8)

...And I saw a messenger coming down out of the heaven, having the key of the [abyss](#), and a great chain over his hand, (Revelation 20:1)

...and he cast him to the [abyss](#), and did shut him up, and put a seal upon him, that he may not lead astray the nations any more, till the thousand years may be finished; and after these it behooves him to be loosed a little time. (Revelation 20:3)

Now let's take at each of these. In context Luke 8, records a conversation that Jesus apparently had with many "demons." According to verse 29 Jesus commanded the demon to come out a man of Gadarene, then according to verse 28 the demon, apparently speaking through the man, asked of Jesus, "what have I to do with you, torment me not.

Why would the demon think that Jesus might torment him? Could it possibly be that this demon understood that torment was a product or result of the judgment of God? In this context it is clear (to this writer at least) that the demon is talking about judgment.

Verse 31 records that the demons requested that Jesus "not command them to go out into the "abyss." Now in the full context of this passage the "abyss" equates to the torment of judgment (v28); it is used here as a metaphor for judgment and punishment/torment. This metaphor is clearly set forth in Psalm 36:6 (see commentary below).

In Romans 10:7, Paul uses the word "abyss" as a metaphor for the grave. Paul chose this metaphor from Psalm 71:20:

O God, who is like unto thee - who has shown me great and sore troubles – [who] shall quicken me again, and shall bring me up again from the abyss (tehome, S's #08415 depths) of the earth. (Psalms 71:20)

Thus, Paul used “abyss” as “a metaphor for the grave.” We know this for certain because Paul knew, as we should know, that the body of Jesus was not to see decay (corruption, Psa.16:10 cf. Acts 2:22-32). Death and the grave are the products of God’s judgment upon man as a result of Adam’s sin in the garden.

Before we proceed to examine the 7 places in Revelation where “abyss” is used let us take a look at the Old Testament. In the Hebrew Old Testament, the Hebrew word “tehome” is the equivalent of the Greek word “abussos.” We know this, in part, because the Hebrew rabbis usually translated the Hebrew “tehome” into the Greek “abussos” when they translated the Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek text (Septuagint, LXX.).

This Hebrew word “tehome” is used 36 times in the OT. In the vast majority (33) of those “tehome” is translated “great deep, depths etc. and these are in reference to deep water (oceans, seas, rivers, wells, etc.) as in the following examples:

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep <tehome>. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:2)

In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep <tehome> broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. (Genesis 7:11)

Psalms 104:6 *Yahweh covered the foundations of the earth with the abyss (great deep) <tehome> as with clothing...*

Of these 36 occurrences of tehome (abyss) none of these are a “metaphor for decay and death.”

The two notable exceptions to this are Psalm 71:20, which is quoted and applied above, and Psalm 36:6:

Your (YHWH’s) righteousness is like the great mountains; **your judgments are an abyss** (tehome): O LORD, you preserve man and beast. (Psalms 36:6)

In this Psalm of David to the chief musician, David sets forth the vices of the wicked and extols the virtues of Yahweh. In verse 6 David compares the righteousness and judgments of Yahweh using two metaphors: Yahweh's righteousness is like the great mountains (i.e. expansive and wondrous) and His judgments are like an abyss (i.e. deep, powerful, destructive, apocalyptic, etc.)

As Paul went to the Psalms for his metaphor for the grave in Romans 10:7; John, in a similar manner, went to the Psalms for his metaphor for the judgment of God in Revelation 9, 11, 17, and 20.

Now let's consider those passages. In Revelation 9 John used the lexeme "abussos" 3 times, once each in verses 1, 2 and 11. Chapter 9 is a rendition of the "trumpet" judgments on the land of Judaea, homeland of the Jews (Judahites). In verse 7 John wrote, "The first angel sounded [the first trumpet], and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the land [of Judaea]: and the third part of trees was burned up, and all green grass was burned up." Then in verse 13 John wrote, "And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the land [of Judaea] by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!

Continuing with these trumpet judgments upon the land of Judaea, John wrote, "And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the land [of Judaea]: and to him was given the key of the shaft (pit) of the abyss." (Rev.9:1) This "star falling from heaven to the land" of Judaea and the presentation of "the key" to this "star" are of very special importance for the people of the land as well as for John's primary audience of readers in the seven churches of Asia.

John marks this special occasion by switching his terminology from "land" to "abyss" right in the middle of this verse. However, John not only changes his language, he adds a very important new element, "the shaft (pit) of the." It should be apparent to most readers that the lexeme "land" in verse 1a parallels the term "abyss" in 1b, but what is this "shaft (pit) of the abyss?"

In verse 2 John tells his intended readers that the "star;" identified as "him," in 1b, used the key and "opened the shaft (pit) of the abyss." Did you notice that, "the star" opened the shaft (pit) to the abyss; he did not open the abyss. What is this shaft to the abyss? Could it possibly be the land of Galilee to the north of Judaea?

Moving on to 1:11, John wrote, “And they (the “locusts” of verse 3ff) have a commander over them, the messenger of the abyss, whose name is Abaddon (Hebrew) -Apollyon (Greek) - Destroyer (English). In this verse, as in other apocalyptic Scriptures (cf. Joel 2:25) the “locusts” are the soldiers of invading armies and their commander is the messenger of judgment and destruction, the abyss, taking place in Jerusalem and in the land of Judaea, v1). Therefore, John is using “abyss” as a metaphor for the judgment within and upon the land of Judaea in chapter 9.

The next reference to “abyss” by John is in Revelation 11:7: “the beast that comes (ascends) out of the abyss.” Who is this beast that is going to come (ascend) out of the abyss? The answer, of course, is found in Revelation 17:8, which is the next reference to the “abyss,” where John explicitly states that the, “beast is about to come (ascend) out of the abyss” and finish the work of the destruction of the whore that is his destiny. Without going into detail here, this is a living, breathing, Beast doing the work of destruction. In verse 11 of this same chapter (17) John tells us exactly who this beast is; he is “an eighth king” of the Roman Empire. Thus, John uses the lexeme “abyss” as a symbol/metaphor for the judgment and destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the land of Judaea which is described in Revelation. It is the apocalyptic symbol/metaphor for the judgment and destruction of Judaea by the armies of the beast and the ten kings (17:12-18:24; and 19:15-21).

In Revelation Chapter 20 we find the final references to this abyss:

“And I see a messenger coming out of the heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain on his hand. And he takes hold of the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and binding him *for* thousands years, And casting him into the abyss, and shutting him up, and setting a seal upon him, that he should be deceiving the nations no more, until the thousand years are fulfilled: and after that it is necessary that he be released for a shorter time.” (Re 20:1-3)

“And when the thousand years expiring, the adversary shall be released out of his prison, and shall come out deceiving the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, gathering them together unto war: of whom the number *is* as the sand of the sea.” (Re 20:7-8)

“And the slanderer deceiving them is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet *are*, and shall be tormented day and night for age and age.” (Re 20:10)

Please note, that in Chapter 9 we saw that the great star which had come out of heaven in chapter 8:10 was given the key to the shaft of the abyss in 9:1 and in 9:2 he used that key to open and subsequently destroy the shaft of the abyss by war. However, in chapter 20 we see that this messenger already has the key, not to the shaft of the abyss, but to the abyss itself. He uses the key to open the abyss, casting the slandering adversary into that abyss and then he uses the key to lock the slandering adversary in the abyss for the thousands years. Thus, once again clearly indicating that, the abyss is the apocalyptic metaphor or symbol of God's judgment on the "evil fig" apostate Jews of the first century.

The above documentation demonstrates the true meaning of the lexeme "abyss" as used in the Revelation is God's judgment upon the apostate house of Judah, their capital city – Jerusalem, and land - Judaea in the first century and I can only pray and hope that the reader will have "ears to listen" (Deut.29:4; Matt.11:15; Mark 4:9; Luke 8:8; et al.) and a "mind which has wisdom" (Rev.17:9).

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