

# Spiritual Forces of Evil Unleashed

## Revelation 9:1-21

The Book of Revelation helps believers to understand more fully the world in which they live. It is not merely a description of the past. Nor is it primarily a description of some distant future. Its message is intended to help believers in every generation until Jesus returns.

Our understanding of the world is not accurate without an awareness of the existence of the spiritual forces of evil, the demonic world.

C.S. Lewis writes concerning demons: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them."

If you believe the Bible is God's Word, then you must believe in the existence of demons. Demons are fallen angels. That means that they are spiritual beings. They were created good by God. And they rebelled against God and have become purely evil, bent on the destruction of mankind, especially the Church.

But we must always balance our thoughts on demons with our understanding the ministry of Christ.

Jesus came into the world to destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8)  
Jesus came to free those who were oppressed by demons. (Matthew 4:24; 8:16)  
It is the authority that Jesus possesses over Satan and his kingdom that enables the Gospel to have the power to save people.

Jesus' authority extends to the sealing of His Church, which prevents demons from destroying the faith in the heart of the believer.

At the same time, the demonic world is an ongoing enemy for the Church. Paul instructs Timothy to be prepared for demons to infiltrate the Church with deceitful teachings that will lead people astray from the truth.

**1 Timothy 4:1-2** Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times (which they were in at the time of Paul's writing) some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, <sup>2</sup> through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared,

Satan and his demonic hordes are constantly opposing God's people.

**Ephesians 6:10-13** <sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup> Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

(Encourage the article)

In Revelation 9 we are brought to the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Trumpets. In these trumpets we see the unleashing of demonic powers against unbelievers. While the warfare of the Christian against the demonic world is real, the demons do not have authority over Christians.

But when it comes to unbelievers, God will sometimes unleash the forces of evil to torture the soul, and eventually, even drive people to kill.

Woe... Woe... Woe...

This is what the eagle, or maybe “vulture”, declares over the final three Trumpets.

The first four trumpets were unleashed upon the creation: the earth, the sea, the springs and rivers, and the sky.

As humans we are both body and soul.

The first four Trumpets afflict the physical world.

But the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Trumpets are directed at the soul.

The spiritual forces of evil oppress the souls of men.

Spiritual oppression torments the soul in deeper ways than mere physical suffering.

Read Rev. 9:1-12.

And  
the fifth angel blew his trumpet,  
and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth,  
and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit.

The star who has fallen is best taken to be Satan.

There are at least 5 separate times in which Satan falls.

1. Satan fell when he initially rebelled. (2 Peter 2:4)
2. Satan fell in the ministry of Jesus and His disciples.
3. Satan fell at the cross.
4. Satan falls as the Gospel goes into all the world.
5. Satan will be crushed under our feet – both in sanctification and at the return of Christ.

But I believe that verse 1 refers to the cross.

**John 12:31-32** <sup>31</sup> Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. <sup>32</sup> And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

The bottomless pit is the place where God holds the spiritual forces of evil as they await their final judgment at the end of the ages.

Because of the cross, Satan is a defeated foe.

**Colossians 2:15** <sup>15</sup> He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

But in this 5<sup>th</sup> Trumpet, Satan is given the key to the abyss. That means that he has limited authority, under Christ who has ultimate authority, to unleash these evil spiritual beings upon this world.

There are many views as to when, and where, and how these forces are unleashed.

The Preterist position is that these horrors are those that fell upon Jerusalem leading up to its destruction in 70 AD by the Romans.

The Futurist position is that these are the horrors that will fall upon the earth during the final 3 ½ years of history.

The Historicist position is that these horrors are those that fell upon the Middle East with the Rise of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century.

I am an Idealist. That means the horrors described in the 5<sup>th</sup> Trumpet may occur at various periods throughout the Church Age.

There is no one particular age in view.

Instead, we are given a picture of the unleashing of the spiritual forces of evil that has occurred at various times and places throughout history.

Just as there are wars and rumors of wars throughout history, so there are times where the forces of evil are unleashed upon this world to a greater or lesser degree.

The point for the hearers of Revelation 9 is to accept the reality of these powerful forces of evil... to remain joined to Christ through persevering faith... and then to stand against these forces: both in the continued preaching of the Gospel and in persevering prayer.

As we look at the images, keep in mind that John is describing spiritual realities using physical images designed to scare you.

The existence of powerful forces of pure evil bent upon your destruction should scare you!

2                    He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit,  
                          and  
                          from the shaft rose smoke  
                                  like the smoke of a great furnace,  
                          and  
                          the sun and the air were darkened  
                                  with the smoke from the shaft.

3                    Then  
                          from the smoke  
                          came locusts on the earth,  
                          and  
                          they were given power  
                                  like the power of scorpions of the earth.

The smoke that is billowing up from the pit helps you to feel the presence of evil. The smoke darkens the sun. This is a picture of the lies and deception produced by these demonic beings. Even at the beginning, Satan clouded the truth of God's Word. He twists and distorts the Word.

The way that we fight against lies and deception is with the truth. This is the way that Jesus defeated Satan in the wilderness temptations. And Jesus told his followers, "You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

We are always in the battle for the truth. And every time the truth is distorted, the fruit is pain and destruction. The spiritual forces of evil are continually encouraging one lie or another.

John sees the demons as "scorpions".

4        They were told not to harm  
              the grass of the earth  
              or  
              any green plant  
              or  
              any tree,  
              but  
              only those people  
                      who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> plague in Egypt, physical locusts devastated the land of Egypt. What was once fertile and beautiful, was completely devastated by locusts. In the book of Joel, the destruction of Jerusalem is depicted by the devastation of locusts. But here in Revelation, we are told that it is not a stripping of the land, but a stripping of the souls of unbelievers, those who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

5        They were allowed to torment them  
              for five months,  
              but  
              not to kill them,  
              and  
              their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone.  
6        And  
              in those days people will seek death  
                      and will not find it.  
              They will long to die,  
                      but death will flee from them.

In the fifth trumpet, the demons are not given authority to kill. They are only given authority to torment the human soul. This torment is described as the torment that comes upon a person when they are stung by a scorpion.

Scorpion stings are not usually fatal. But they can cause excruciating pain. But we must remind ourselves that the pain that is felt is spiritual torment.

I am not sure that the person experiencing this torment is always aware of the demons involved. They are simply miserable, so miserable that they long for death.

It is not a coincidence that in our own day that we have seen an increasing sense of despair in our world. I can point to many physical factors that contribute to this. But any explanation would be incomplete without some awareness of the spiritual forces of evil being unleashed in our midst.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> Trumpet, these same demons will be able to orchestrate killing. Whether this is through demon possession, like with Judas, or whether it is simply through their powers of deception is unclear. But here in the 5<sup>th</sup> trumpet they are only given power to torment.

Because I think the trumpets are all occurring at various times in history, I believe that we are to understand the distinction between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Trumpets as only a matter of God determining when spiritual oppression will end in death. These spiritual forces are under the control of Jesus Christ.

I can envision a person being under great spiritual oppression, and then being brought to Jesus Christ. Is that not what Jesus did when he healed people who were possessed by demons?

But at some point, the spiritual torment will flow into the 6<sup>th</sup> Trumpet which has its end in death.

Before we get to the 6<sup>th</sup> Trumpet, we are given a gruesome picture of these locusts. The imagery is not literal, but symbolic of spiritual truths.

<sup>7</sup> In appearance  
the locusts were like horses prepared for battle:

The image of warhorse makes clear that we are in a spiritual war with demons.

on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold;

Demons are described in scripture as “rulers and authorities”. Their rule exists “behind” the physical rulers of pagan kingdoms.

their faces were like human faces,

Demons are highly intelligent. We do not outsmart demons. We defeat them by submitting our hearts to the Word of God.

<sup>8</sup> their hair like women's hair,





The mention that these people had been prepared for “this very hour and day and month and year” reminds us that God is very specific in controlling even these terrible forces of evil. They do not act randomly.

It may look like evil simply swoops over the earth, but God is controlling the destiny of each person individually.

As in all the trumpets a third of mankind is killed. The destruction is partial because it occurs throughout the time between Jesus’ resurrection and His return.

Again, the picture of these demonic hordes that bring such devastation is horrific.

16                   The number of mounted troops was  
                                  twice ten thousand times ten thousand;  
                                  I heard their number.

17                   And  
                                  this is how I saw the horses in my vision  
                                  and  
                                  those who rode them:  
  they wore breastplates the color  
  of fire  
  and  
  of sapphire  
  and  
  of sulfur,

                                  and  
                                  the heads of the horses were like lions' heads,  
                                  and  
                                  fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths.

18                   By these three plagues  
                                  a third of mankind was killed,  
  by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths.

19                   For the power of the horses is  
  in their mouths  
  and  
  in their tails,  
  for their tails are like serpents with heads,  
  and  
  by means of them they wound.

The army of demons is heard to be 200 million.

Literally, the Greek reads: double myriads of myriads.

This speaks to the vast number of spiritual beings that fell. They are not limitless. But they are vast.

We are not told how people are killed, but we see a clear difference between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Trumpets.

When people die, if they are not trusting in Jesus Christ, their death is a foreshadow of their eternal judgment. Death does not usher everyone into a state of bliss. For those who do not know Jesus Christ, they face an eternal torment.

But it is not those who have died that is the focus. It is the reaction of those who are still living. Rather than recognizing that they too are in need of forgiveness and cleansing at the foot of the cross, they harden themselves in their rebellion.

Read Rev. 9:20-21.

20       The rest of mankind,  
                  who were not killed by these plagues,  
                  did not repent of the works of their hands  
                  nor  
                  give up worshipping  
                  demons  
                  and  
                  idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood,  
                  which cannot see or hear or walk,  
21       nor  
                  did they repent of their murders  
                  or their sorceries  
                  or their sexual immorality  
                  or their thefts.

It is not that God is not bringing anyone to repentance. He certainly uses spiritual torments to bring people to Himself. But that requires another work of grace. The hardships are not enough in themselves.

Many people, like Pharaoh of old, harden their hearts and still do not repent of the work of their hands.

They still do not stop worshipping demons (the very ones who are torturing them by the way)

They continue worshipping idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood.

They do not repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality, or their thefts.

Anytime anyone ever comes to repentance, it is the fruit of God's gracious work deep in their souls to give them new life.

Both plagues represent the ruinous objective of the demons.

The fifth trumpet depicts spiritual torment of the soul.

The sixth trumpet depicts those same demons being given additional freedom to incite evil producing death on a vast scale.

Any time humans flippantly kill innocent life, there are spiritual forces at work. Even when there are good and just reasons to take the life of another, we do not do so lightly. The devaluing of life is a sign of the spiritual forces of evil being unleashed in our world.

These seasons have occurred throughout history and there is little doubt that they are on the rise in our own time.

This does not necessarily mean that Jesus will come in our lifetime. He very well may. But Jesus may also tarry for the purposes of continuing to save His elect.

#### Applications:

1. We must remember that the spiritual forces of evil are real and they are unleashed to lesser or greater extent across the world and across history.
2. Appreciate the protection that God gives you every day from your demonic enemies.
  - a. Without this protection you would be overwhelmed by these evil forces.
3. While you are protected from demons, you also must wage war with them in at least two ways: through being a witness to the lost, and through your continuing struggle with sin.
  - a. Without Christ's binding of the strong man, the Gospel could not go forward.
  - b. You are not strong enough to conquer your own flesh. How could you possibly be strong enough to overcome the spiritual forces of evil? It is only by the help of the Holy Spirit working through the truth of the Word of God and faithful prayer that we can conquer Satan.
4. While every lost individual is responsible to repent and believe, they really are bound by their sinful heart and by the demonic realm. They really do need to be set free. We who have been set free are to pray to Christ to free them. Mary Magdalene was set free from seven demons.
5. God uses evil forces for his own purposes. Sometimes, He will use the torment as preparation before calling a person to Himself. Other times, He will use these forces to execute judgment upon the lost. Either way, even the rebellious hordes of evil exist under the authority of Christ.
6. While demons oppress individuals, they also steer whole societies away from Christ. Satanic lies are behind every evil. But when a whole society begins to promote terrible evils as if they are somehow good, we can be sure that there are spiritual forces of evil being unleashed.
  - a. I am a conspiracy theorist. But the conspiracy is occurring in the spiritual world.
    - i. The apostasy of the Church from the most basic truths of the Gospel smells like the work of demons.
    - ii. The deception that darkens our minds on the issue of abortion smells of the pit. I recently read that worldwide it is estimated that of the 200 million babies born in the world each year, there are as many as 50 million that are aborted.
    - iii. When a young person believes that they are in the wrong body and are willing through hormones or surgery to change their gender, there are forces of evil that are at work.
    - iv. When political loyalties drive people to levels of vitriol and hatred that bring them to find pleasure in the killing and maiming other human beings, you can be sure that the spiritual forces of evil are at work.

- v. None of this reduces our own accountability before God. But it should help us to see that our struggle is not against “flesh and blood”, but the spiritual forces of evil.
7. Revelation teaches us that when these seasons of evil arise, they are still under the sovereign control of Jesus Christ. As terrible as they are, they are not a threat to Christ.
    - a. The only reason we do not live in fear is that we know that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
    - b. He is our Defender.
    - c. He is our Strong Tower.
    - d. While we must fight the spiritual forces of evil, we do not ever fight against the full brunt of his fury.
      - i. Only Jesus has done this: In His wilderness temptations... in the Garden of Gethsemane... and on the cross.
  8. Our task is to fix our eyes on Jesus.
    - a. Satan works to accuse you that your sins cannot be forgiven and cleansed.
      - i. You must remember the blood of Christ and the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit.
    - b. Satan works to entice you into sin.
      - i. You must use the Bible to renew your mind as to God’s good and perfect will for your life.
    - c. Satan works to deceive you into believing that it is your sin that defines you.
      - i. You must remember that you are a new creation and that your old sinful heart has been crucified with Christ.
    - d. Satan works to make you believe that evil is winning.
      - i. You must remember that he is a defeated foe.

It may be helpful to read a few quotes from Martin Luther. He writes:

You should tell the devil, ‘Just by telling me that I am a miserable, great sinner you are placing a sword and weapon into my hand with which I can decisively overcome you; yea, with your own weapon I can kill and floor you. For if you can tell me that I am a poor sinner, I on the other hand, can tell you that Christ died for sinners, and is their Intercessor ... You remind me of the boundless, great faithfulness and benefaction of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ... to Him I direct you. You may accuse and condemn Him. Let me rest in peace; for on His shoulders, not on mine, lie all my sins ...’

If the devil approaches us and says, ‘Look here, see how great your sin is; see too, how bitter, how terrible is the death you must suffer,’ we can answer: ‘Devil, don’t you know the power of my Lord Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection? In Him there is eternal righteousness and eternal life; His resurrection from the dead is mightier than my sin, death, and hell’ ... this is all so very true that the devil cannot deny it.

Satan would gladly kill me if he could. Every moment he is pressing me, is treading on my heels. Yet what he wishes will not be done, but what God wills.

*Martin Luther*

1 A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;  
our helper he, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.  
For still our ancient foe does seek to work us woe;  
his craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate,  
on earth is not his equal.

2 Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing,  
were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing.  
You ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is he;  
Lord Sabaoth his name, from age to age the same;  
and he must win the battle.

3 And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,  
we will not fear, for God has willed his truth to triumph through us.  
The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him;  
his rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure;  
one little word shall fell him.

4 That Word above all earthly powers no thanks to them abideth;  
the Spirit and the gifts are ours through him who with us sideth.  
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;  
the body they may kill: God's truth abideth still;  
his kingdom is forever!

The evil around you is great.  
You wrestle against a foe that is more powerful than you.  
But through the Gospel, Jesus will soon crush Satan under your feet.

**Romans 16:20** <sup>20</sup> The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.