

Demons From The Abyss/Armies From The East (Revelation 9:1-21)

Introduction

“I wish I could die” is a hyperbolic statement that we carelessly and thoughtlessly toss about when we are angry, hurt, or disappointed. We don’t really mean it when we say it. It simply expresses our strong feelings and emotions at a situation or circumstance we are not happy about, that we wish were different. However, there is coming a day when men will say “I wish I could die” and they will mean it. But amazingly they will not be able to find it though they seek it with all their heart. Imagine that: a day when men will desire death more than life, when they will desire death even more than they desire God. When, you might ask, will that be? Answer: When demons arise from the abyss and armies come from the east; when the 5th angel sounds his trumpet in Revelation 9. This chapter divides evenly into 2 parts: the 5th trumpet comprises verses 1-12 and signals the demons from the abyss. The 6th trumpet is detailed in verses 13-21 and records the coming of an army of 200 million, as well as humanity’s steadfast refusal to repent of its sin. In all that is recorded the absolute and awesome sovereignty of God is on full display. He is in control. Even demons do His bidding. What is it in particular God would want us to learn from this frightening chapter?

I. God uses demons to carry out His judgments. **9:1-12**

John needed only 6 verses to set forth the first 4 trumpets of chapter 4. Now he devotes an entire chapter, 21 verses to trumpets 5 & 6, the 1st and 2nd woes. Demonic activity will dominate the plagues and judgements associated with both. Demons are certainly alive and active in our day. Jesus believed and taught their existence. Amazingly most professing Christians are out of step with the Son of God on this. A recent Barna survey found that only 27% believe Satan to be real (*Baptist Press* 8-14-01). But the Bible teaches they are real, and they will be on a rampage when the Great Tribulation arrives. In these verses we learn something about their character and their conduct, their master and their terror.

1. Satan is their leader. **9:1-2, 11-12**

The 5th angel sounds and John sees a star from heaven, which had fallen to the earth. “Had fallen” is a perfect tense participle emphasizing an event in past time with continuing results. This star, unlike the star of 8:10, is a person (note the personal pronouns applied throughout). The statement is reminiscent of Luke 10:18 where Jesus said, “I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.” Though dogmatism is unwarranted, I believe the best interpretation is to see this as a reference to Satan. It is neither a good angel nor a chief demon under the devil’s direction. It is Satan, the devil himself who is in view. What does the text say about him?

a) **He fell from heaven.**

9:1-2

He had fallen, it had already occurred prior to the blowing of the 5th trumpet. Lucifer, the star of the morning, son of the dawn (Isaiah 14:12), the anointed cherub (Ezekiel 28:14) was cast out of God's presence and heaven's glory when sin was found in his heart. Now as we move toward history's climax, he is allowed a diabolical freedom he was previously denied. The key (authority) to the bottomless pit (the abyss, mentioned 9 times in the New Testament), a prison house for demons (cf. Luke 8:31; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6) and the abode of the dead (Romans 10:7) is given [by God; divine passive] to him. Immediately he opens it (verse 2) and smoke, dark and hot, fills the air and darkens the sun. The beast, the Antichrist, will arise from the Abyss (11:7). Satan will be imprisoned there for 1000 years following the 2nd coming of Jesus (20:1-3). His fall is great indeed.

b) **He fights humanity.**

9:11-12

King, again a reference to Satan, over the abyss:

Hebrew – Abaddon meaning destruction

Greek – Apollyon meaning destroyer

The Hebrew word *Abaddon* appears six times in the Old Testament and is derived from a verb that can mean “to become lost,” “to perish,” or “to destroy, kill.” *Abaddon* has a similar meaning to Hades as used in Revelation 1:18, 6:8. A similar usage is found in Psalm 88:11 where it is paralleled with the grave. Job 31:12 used the word to imply an unquenchable appetite. *Abaddon* is not only a place, but also a person. This personification of *Abaddon* lies behind its choice as a name for the angel of the underworld and king of the locusts in Revelation 9:11. Though *Abaddon* is under God's sovereign power, it has an insatiable appetite and represents not only a destruction that takes life but a destruction that reaches beyond the grave to the afterlife. Qumran material demonstrates that the role of the angel of the abyss is like that of Belial, mentioned 33 times in the Dead Sea Scrolls and described about 27 times in the Old Testament as a worthless, good-for-nothing, base counselor of ruin. He was the military leader of the forces of darkness, who was allowed to be “unleashed against” Israel. Belial terrorized the sons of the covenant. Though not frequent, the word *Abaddon* is found in later rabbinic literature and came to stand for the place of the wicked dead. *Abaddon* would have conjured images of doom and despair for John's readers and would have made even more fearful the torture coming at the hand of the angel of the underworld and his army of destroyers.

Apollyon, the Greek counterpart to *Abaddon*, is used as a proper name only here in the Bible. The word is actually a present active participle meaning “the one who destroys.” Something more subtle, however, may have been in John's use of *Apollyon* to translate *Abaddon*. John may have intended an indirect attack on the Greek/Roman god Apollo, and thus on the reigning emperor, Domitian, who thought of himself as Apollo incarnate. *Apollyon* and Apollo (Apollon in Greek) look and sound alike. Furthermore, worshipers of Apollo had as one of their symbols for him the locust. In John's drama the Greek reader could not have missed the echo of the name Apollo, the god, and *Apollyon*, the destroyer. The well-known pagan god,

favorite of the emperor whose persecution of Christians lies behind the Revelation, is identified with hell and destruction.

2. **Suffering is their legacy.** **9:3-10**

Demons mean humans nothing but harm, pain and suffering. They delight in disease, disaster and death. Never is this more evident than in this text.

a) **They torment.** **9:3-6**

When the shaft to the abyss is opened, demons in the form of locusts flood the earth. Power (authority) is given them like scorpions. This is reminiscent of the locust vision of Joel 1:6; 2:4-10. These are not literal locusts, however, who can travel in columns 4 miles wide and 100 feet deep. These are demons, driven to torment mankind spiritually, physically and in every other way as well.

Verses 4 – 6 make clear their mission: to torment all persons who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads (cf. 7:2ff). Believers will not be touched by these ambassadors from hell. But there is a limitation to what they can do: torment – yes, kill – no. Verse 5 places a further limitation in terms of time: 5 months. The normal life span of a locust was approximately May – September, 5 months. This verse would also seem to indicate the torment they inflict is primarily physical: stinging and striking like that of a scorpion.

Verse 6 is amazing. While death will be the lot of Christian martyrs at the hands of evil men, these same evil men will seek, look for the same fate they inflict on others, but they will not find it. They will long or yearn for it, but it will run from them and they will be unable to catch it. For thousands of years men have run from the grim reaper only to find him too swift to evade. Now, men chase him but find they are too slow of foot. What irony. What tragedy.

*Demon possession may prevent their suicide for a time.

b) **They terrify.** **9:7-10**

These verses provide a detailed description of these demons who have been confined perhaps, since Satan's fall. John is probably more concerned with the overall impression made by this vision than he is with the details. Still, without pressing the particulars beyond reason, we learn something about these maniacal monsters from the pit. The composite picture is that of unnatural and uninhibited evil and wickedness.

Horses prepared for battle – they are an army prepared to wage war against God and His people. Further, they are of considerable size and hence terrifying in appearance. Crowns of gold – authority and power.

Faces like the faces of men – intelligence. They are cunning and cruel, wise and wicked, there is a method to their madness. They have a leader and they follow a well-orchestrated game plan.

Hair of a woman – (?) perhaps an indication of the long antennae of locust or to the seductiveness of their strategies.

Teeth like a lion – fierceness and deathlike power in their attack.

Breastplates of iron – virtually invulnerable. They are strong and well protected. It would take a supernatural power greater than their own to defeat them.

Sound of their wings ... sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle – they are intimidating in their coming. The sound of their attack and approach would strike fear in the heart of any opponent who attempted to oppose them.

Tails like scorpions – they possess a painful sting that causes great agony and great suffering.

Hurt for 5 months – repeats verse 5 and adds emphasis and intensity to their mission of misery.

The horror of this judgement is unspeakable and yet, the worse is yet to come. Verse 12 simply and straightforwardly says, the first woe (5th trumpet) is past; behold (take notice, look here!), two woes (6th & 7th trumpets) are still coming after these things. The 1st disaster has passed, but I see 2 more on the way, just around the corner.

Transition

- 1) God uses demons to carry out His judgements.
- 2) God uses armies to carry out His judgements.

II. God uses armies to carry out His judgments.

9:13-21

If Revelation teaches us anything it teaches us that God is in control. He is Lord, He is sovereign. History has a purpose and that purpose is God's. History is following a plan and that plan is God's.

1. God's judgment is a demonstration of His sovereignty.

9:13-19

The 6th angel sounds and an unspecified voice speaks from the golden altar which is before God. Possibly this is the angel-priest of 8:3-5. He speaks to the 6th angel with a clear and precise word. From it we learn an incredible lesson.

a) God directs their destiny.

9:13-16

* "Release the 4 angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." These angels, I believe, are demons. Good angels are never said to be bound. The Euphrates marked to the east the boundary separating Israel from her primary enemies.

* Verse 15 reveals that God's plans are not accidental or willy-nilly. They had been prepared (perfect tense) for the 1) hour, 2) day, 3) month, and 4) year. This is a precise time. There is also a precise purpose. To kill 1/3 of mankind. Combined with Revelation 6:8, we discover that ½ of the earth's population will die as a result of the seal and trumpet judgements. The carnage is unfathomable. Verse 16 tells us there is a precise army 200,000,000 horsemen. John says, I heard the number.

* The 200 million army: demons or humans? An either/or decision may not be necessary or even best. Some connect the army with the kings of the east in 16:12 and identify them with a human army. Interestingly *Time* magazine (May 21, 1965), noted that China then claimed an army of 200 million. It is certainly possible, even reasonable to believe demons will work through human instrumentality in this day. Still, the primary description before us would appear to be that of additional demons.

The remarkable description of the horses and their riders would support this. To think of a world with 200 million additional demons is beyond human imagination.

Transition

Remember: it is God who directs their destiny.

b) God determines their destruction. 9:17-19

Only here in Revelation does John directly indicate the visionary nature of what he experienced. Again the overall impression of the horses and their riders is more important than the details. John saw in the vision the following:

Riders with breastplates of fire and hyacinth (dark blue) and of brimstone (sulphurous) – the red, blue and yellow of the protective breastplates matches the fire, smoke and brimstone that comes out of the mouth of the horses (verse 18).

Heads of the horses are like the heads of lions – speaks of ferocity, cruelty and destructive strength and power.

The destructive forces of fire, smoke and brimstone proceed from their mouths and by these 3 plagues 1/3 of mankind is killed. Verse 16 provides an additional descriptive word: there is also power in the horses' tails, for they are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm. With their mouths they kill and with their tails they harm. From either direction or both ends, they have the capacity to damage and destroy. Such a description supports the view that these are demon hordes which are causing havoc on the earth. Fire breathing monsters were common in ancient mythology. Fire breathing demons will be a reality during the Great Tribulation. One cannot help but think back to Genesis 19 when fire and brimstone rained on Sodom and Gomorrah. Then it affected 2 cities. In the future much of the world will suffer.

2. God's judgment is a demonstration of man's sinfulness. 9:20-21

The most tragic and terrifying reality of Revelation 9 is not the judgements of God, but the sinfulness of man. Even as God punishes them for their sins, they persist in them.

a) Man does not repent of his idolatry. 9:20

Rest of mankind – those who did not die - literally “not repented.” (repented in verse 21). They would not worship the works of God's hands, but they did worship the work of their hands (cf. Romans 1:18ff). And note: idolatry and demon worship go hand in hand. To worship stuff made of gold, silver, brass, stone or wood is to worship Satan. Here are dead sinners worshipping dead gods (they cannot see, hear or walk) and demon gods! What folly! What fools! God is robbed of His rightful glory as demons take His place in the lives of men and women around the world.

b) **Man does not repent of his immorality.**

9:21

4 additional sins are selectively listed in verse 21. Perhaps these stand out in the last days.

Sorceries – (*pharmakon*) – witchcraft, magic art; use of drugs for divination or healing was a part of pagan, false religion.

Immorality – (*porneia*) – all forms of sexual sin.

* These sins involve a basic violation of the 10 commandments (cf. Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5). Idolatry violates the 1st and 2nd commandments. Murder violates the 6th, immorality the 7th, and thefts the 8th. As in the days of the Judges it will be a time of unbridled evil, with “every man doing that which is right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). Such a day is coming or, is such a day already here?

Conclusion

W. A. Criswell pastored the FBC, Dallas for 50 years. Reflecting and writing on these very verses he wisely noted, “One of the strange things about human nature is that man is not changed because of punishment ... He may desist from evil because he is afraid, but his heart is still evil. He would do evil if he could get by with it. A man is really changed only by the Gospel of the grace of the Son of God ... Our hope lies in the saving power of the Gospel of Christ” (pages 192-193).

One would think demons from the abyss and armies from the east would get humanity’s attention. What an amazing reality it is that it does not. May we, by God’s grace, be different. The stakes, I would remind you, are extremely high.