

Serppolions

Demonic Deception and Its Deadly Effects

Revelation 9:12 The **first woe** has passed; behold, **two woes** are still to come.

¹³ Then the sixth angel blew his **trumpet**, and I heard a voice from **the four horns** of the golden altar before God,

¹⁴ saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release **the four angels** who are bound at the great river Euphrates."

¹⁵ So **the four angels**, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill **a third of mankind**.

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.

²⁰ **The rest of mankind, who were not killed** by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping 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.

(Revelation 9:12-21)

The Human Heart

If we did not have the Scripture, **the human heart** would be a truly inexplicable thing. On one hand, it is **religious above all things**. On the other, left unregenerated, it actively seeks to **deny** the only actual source of all things. And it does so while pretending it isn't doing that. This is why humanity is lost in a cesspool of false religions, including Christian cults. Humans were created in the image and likeness of God, we were given dominion over the earth, and had direct fellowship with Christ in the perfect setting imaginable. But all this was not enough, and we fell away from our Creator. The Fall left us with **a God-shaped vacuum** that can only be filled by him. Yet, men will not turn to him. Instead, they turn to everything but him. **Blaise Pascal famously wrote,**

What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself.

(**Blaise Pascal**, *Pensées* VII[425])

Jeremiah told us, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer 17:9). The YLT translates it, “Crooked is the heart above all things, And it is incurable – who doth know it?” The DRA has, “The heart is perverse above all things, and unsearchable, who can know it?” The TNK says, “Most devious is the heart; It is perverse – who can fathom it?” Deceitful, crooked, perverse, devious ... sick, incurable, unsearchable. Other translations say weak, wicked, cunning ... corrupt, depraved, bad, beyond help. This is the human condition.

Paul says of all mankind, “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things” (Rom 1:21-23). It is the heart that leads us away from God. It is the heart that causes us to turn to the worship of his creation. It is the heart that lures us into deep sin and rebellion against our Creator. It is the heart of the Jew. It is the heart of the Gentile. It is the heart of man. It is the heart

of **woman**. It is the heart of a **child**. It is your heart. It is my heart. It is all of our hearts.

But there are other outside factors at work as well. **Invisible evil powers**. Their effects in this world are often seen in the things men say and teach and propagate with their mouths. Lies. Deceptions. Untruths. Falsehoods. Sometimes these are premeditated. Other times men are conned and duped. It happens in families. It happens in churches. It happens in the state. Evil ideas that tempt our hearts from the outside to turn away from God on the inside. But they do not originate with us. They have satanic and demonic origins in the supernatural world where ideas, words, and thoughts are the clay used to mold people's minds and get them to think and then turn on their Creator. **Doctrines of demons**, the Apostle calls them. The human heart is bad enough but add this second level and you truly have a recipe for spiritual disaster.

Revelation 9:12-21 Context and Structure

Revelation 9:12-21 presents us with the **second of three woes (9:12)**. These three woes correspond to the **fifth, sixth, and seventh trumpets** of the Trumpet Cycle of Revelation (ch. 8-11). Chapter 9 contains the fifth and sixth trumpets

(first and second woes), but not many have noticed that they very much parallel one another. I believe this is really quite important for interpretation.

Fifth and Sixth Trumpets of Revelation 9 Paralleled					
8:13		Woe, Woe, Woe Preface	1st Woe Passed, 2 More Preface		9:12
HEAVEN	(9:1a)	Fifth Trumpet: Star from heaven	Sixth Trumpet: Voice from golden altar		(9:13)
OPENED	(1b-2a)	Opened from the bottomless pit	Released from the great river Euphrates		(14)
NUMBER	(2b-3)	To many locusts to count given power like scorpions	Two hundred million mounted troops prepared for this hour and day		(15-16)
Long to die	(4-6)	Do not harm God's people but torment the rest for five months. They will long to die.			
DESCRIPTION	(7-9)	Description of Locupions	Description of Hippolionerpents		(17)
Die			By these three plagues (fire, smoke, sulfur) 1/3 mankind killed		(18)
TAILS	(10)	Tails sting like scorpions, hurt for five months	Mouths and tails like serpents, by means of them they wound		(19)
FALSE WORSHIP	(11)	Their King: Abaddon/Apollyon	Those who do not die do not repent of worshiping demons and idols		(20-21)

In them both we begin in heaven. In both we find something opened or released. That something in both is a gigantic number of creatures—uncountable in one and astronomical in the other. This represents what I believe are demonic entities in both places; the creatures are described in detail in parallel sections. Both have tails which sting and wound.

And both do it for reasons **related to demonic worship** and idolatry.

Yet, the parallels should **not be read as identical twins**, for the hideous creatures in both passages look quite different. Perhaps fraternal twins might be a better image. But even here, what I will call the Serppolions (from serpents, horses=Gk.*hippos*, and lions) take the work of the Locupions or Scorcusts a step further. For in the fifth trumpet, the creatures can **only harm** those who do not have the mark of the Holy Spirit on their foreheads. But now, in the sixth trumpet, 1/3 of those are **killed**. The punishment is growing increasingly worse as we move through the cycles of sevens. But it is the climax here that gives a truly horrifying statement of the human heart in response to God's judgments against sin. **"They did not repent"** (9:20). That statement is the opposite of those who think the human heart is basically good and that God owes everyone salvation. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

The sixth trumpet is **its own contained unit** and is essentially chiasmic, with the center focusing either on the description of the creatures (Leithart) or the destruction of 1/3 of mankind (Smith):

A. Release of the angels at the Euphrates, vv. 13–15

B. Number of horsemen, v. 16

C. Description of horsemen, vv. 17–18

B'. Power of the horses, v. 19

A'. Rest of mankind does not repent, vv. 20–21

A. **Sixth trumpet: Four angels at Euphrates** (9:13-15)

B. **Number of horsemen/appearance of houses and riders** (9:16-17a)

C. **Out of their mouths: fire, smoke, sulfur** (9:17b)

D. Three plagues kill 1/3 of mankind (9:18a)

C¹. **Fire, smoke, sulfur: Out of their mouths** (9:18b)

B¹. **Power of horses in mouths and tails like serpents to harm** (9:19)

A¹. **Rest of mankind not killed** did not repent (9:20-21)

The sixth trumpet also **parallels the sixth seal** in that both are divided into **three large sections**, making them the largest in each set by far. This further illustrates that the trumpets are related to the seals and that to understand the one, you must understand the other.

Sixth Seal (6:12-7:17)	Sixth Trumpet
Men in terror of God's wrath	Angels kill a third of mankind (9:13-21)
Angel stops the catastrophe and seals 144,000	Angel comes out of heaven in a cloud with a book (10:1-11)
Eschatological vision of church worshipping in heaven	John given rod to measure temple— two witnesses (11:1-13)

Serppioliions

The passage begins by repeating this idea of **three woes** raised in **8:13**. “**Woe, woe, woe**” becomes, “**The first woe has passed; behind, two more woes are still to come**” (**Rev 9:12**). **Woe** (*ouai*) is an interjection **expressing extreme displeasure** and **calling for retributive pain** on someone or something (Frieberg). It is sometimes translated “Alas!” This is the only place in Scripture where we find three woes in succession like this, though we often find more (**Isa 5; Hab 2; Matt 23**).

The first woe is the fifth trumpet. Now we enter the second woe. “**Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet...**” (**Rev 9:13-14a**). If the first time the woes were stated it was from **the Eagle** creature, this one could be from **the Bull** creature, since it is near the altar. The bull is the animal of the sacrifice and priest. If so, it would intensify the idea of worship and sacrifice.

However, it could very well be the voice of the **Son of God**. He will return in a dramatic theophany in ch. 10, which is still part of this sixth trumpet section. A third possibility is that it is the voice of **the Holy Spirit**. This also

keys in on the altar. We've seen this altar previously. John had seen “under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God” (Rev 6:9) and “another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne” (8:3). Then, he took the censor and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and suddenly the seven angels with seven trumpets prepared to blow them (5-6).

If it is the Spirit, you are to remember that the prayers of God's people and the incense come together. The Psalmist says, “Let my prayer be counted as incense before you” (Ps 141:2). Incense goes on the altar and where there is an altar, there is smoke. The smoke of the altar stands in opposition to the smoke from the abyss (Rev 9:2). This smoke reminds us of the Holy Spirit, who is the fire of God who descended upon Israel as the pillar of smokey fire, who surrounded the Angel of the LORD as fire in the bush, and who was covenant witness to Abraham in the smoking pot.

It should not bother you, this idea that the Spirit could be speaking. After all, he is a Person, not a force. In Acts we read, “And the Spirit said to Philip...” (Acts 8:29). While Peter was pondering the vision, “The Spirit said to him...”

(10:19). In Jerusalem “While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said...” (13:2). Perhaps then it is the Holy Spirit’s voice who now calls from the four horns—the symbol of power.

Whoever it is, he commands this angel, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates” (14). Binding of angelic creatures is something we will see again when we come to the much-discussed millennial binding of Satan (20:2). In that case, the binding is clearly for punishment, even as it is when Jesus says that he “bound” the Strongman, Beelzebub, in a passage that is very similar (Matt 12:28-29). Probably because of this, some commentators say that these angels have been restrained against their will (like the demons confined to the abyss). And therefore, they are probably demonic.¹

However, binding is language we find associated with the constellations, who are “bound” in the heavens. “Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion? Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season, or can you guide the Bear with its children?” (Job 38:31-32). This isn’t a negative binding, but one associated with

¹ For example, G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 506. Gentry (756), same idea.

obedience to God's laws. In fact, there is a close association between the idea of covenant and binding. This is reflected in the German words for a covenant: *bund* (noun) and *binden* (verb).

This binding therefore could be talking about the covenant of creation, the covenant Jeremiah calls the covenant with the day and night (Jer 33:20).² This idea seems to be reflected in the language of vs. 15 that these four angels “had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year...” It most obviously displays God's absolute sovereignty over these creatures. They go because he prepared them for this. In any other context, it would remind us of seasons and calendars and astronomical alignments and other things that we've seen previously with the heavenly creatures. Because of this, I tend to think these are good angels that are at the appropriate moment carrying out God's will here.³

² I see this as the same covenant we talk about when we discuss the “covenant of works” or the “covenant of life.” God put all of creation, including Adam and Eve, in a covenant relationship with himself. We usually only discuss this from the human perspective. Jeremiah is discussing it from the cosmic perspective.

³ This text seems could help the idea that they are good. “In those days, the angels will assemble and thrust themselves to the east at the Parthians and Medes. They will shake up the kings (so that) a spirit of unrest shall come upon them, and stir them up from their thrones; and they will break forth from their beds like lions and like hungry hyenas among their own flocks. And they will go up and trample upon the land of my elect ones, and the land of my elect ones will be before them like a threshing floor or a highway” (1 Enoch 56:5-6).

There are four angels, and we've seen "four" many times before. **Four living creatures** are before the throne (4:6). They each have **four faces**. **Four angels** stand at the **four corners** of the earth and hold back **four winds** (7:1). Of course, we've just seen the altar which has **four horns** (9:13). In every instance, this is a way of talking about totality (north, south, east, west). There is no reason to deny that here, meaning that we have some kind of totality in mind in the coming trumpet.

Next we come to this place call **the Euphrates**. This is one of the original rivers that came out of **Eden** (**Gen 2:14**). It is also the eastern boundary promised to Abraham of the **Promised Land** (15:18). As such, Preterists see this as a clear sign that what will be in mind here is, again, the **destruction of the temple** in 70AD, and even point to how Rome came from this very place on their way to finally sack Jerusalem. While the timing, as ever, is difficult to know, it is important to mention that there is some kind of **parallel to the coming sixth bowl** of wrath the Euphrates is dried up allowing kings to assemble for **Armageddon** (16:12-16). Again, Preterists also take that to refer to 70AD, but most see it as a reference to **the end times crisis**. Arguments have been made for both. Whichever the case, certainly Poythress is right when he

says, “Nations as well as individuals ... may find themselves overwhelmed in ... judgment brought against them. It happened to ancient Babylon, to Greece, to Rome, to Hitler’s Third Reich, and to the Soviet Union.”⁴ In other words, the same idea has happened many times, even if this is referring to a specific event past or future event.

More theologically, this reminds us of only one other thing in the Bible: **Passover**, which was on a specific year, day, month, and even hour (midnight). This act will begin a new kind of Passover. This fits especially with what the Angels are prepared to do.

What are these angels prepared to do? As we’ve just seen: **Judgment**. Specifically, they are released “**to kill a third of mankind**” (9:15b). Again, mankind could be translated simply as “men,” and could have the narrow idea of punishment upon Israel. But the language that comes next makes me think something bigger than the destruction of the Jewish way of life is at stake here, as devastating as that was.

First, we see that these four angels command **legions of troops**. The number of troops is not uncountable as it was in the fifth seal. Yet for all intents and purposes it is the same

⁴ Vern Poythress, *The Returning King* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000), 124.

thing. For this number is **astronomical**, by far the largest number in the Bible. “**Twice ten thousand times ten thousand**” or 200,000,000. “**I heard their number**” (15c). To me, I don’t understand why you would need 200,000,000 troops to destroy Jerusalem, and I say that realizing that this is a form of hyperbole.

As much as Dispensationalism might want to see something like a 200,000,000 Chinese army,⁵ in the Bible, this kind of number is only used to describe **the spiritual host**. “**The chariots of God are twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands**” (Ps 68:17). That’s angels. “**A thousand thousand served him, ten thousand times ten thousand**” (Dan 7:10). Again, heavenly beings. “**Around the throne of heaven there are myriads and myriads, and thousands of thousands**” (Rev 5:11; cf. 1En 60:1). So this is not a human army, which should be obvious from the description.

The troops themselves are **described** next. “**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 lion’s heads,**

⁵ For example, Walvoord; Lindsey, “For the first time in history there is an oriental power that can do exactly what this prophecy foretells!” Curiously, the People’s Liberation Army only has about 2,250,000 troops in it right now. Cited in **Gentry**, 760.

and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths” (Rev 9:17-18). Both riders and horses wear the same colored and terrifying breastplates. The description is meant to terrify, like some kind of ghastly army in a horror movie.

You could argue that the colors are essentially red, blue, and yellow—the primary colors. The primary colors, of course, contain all others in them. Oecumenius says the blue (sapphire/hyacinth) is the color of the sky and reminds us that this is a heavenly army. The fire and sulfur remind us of hell and hint that it is a demonic army. Those are not contradictory if you understand that fallen angels are still “heavenly” creatures and, like the fifth trumpet, the army is doing God’s bidding.

Remember that we were by the altar. Leithart points out that not only are breastplates armor, but they were also part of the high priest’s garb. This “blue” could be described as a purple, further solidifying that image. As the Levites with Shechem, the Levites in the Golden Calf story, and Phinehas killing the Moabite and Israelite who were worshipping Baal in front of the tent demonstrate, the priest is a warrior. In all cases, false worship was involved, which is very important,

as we will see shortly. In all cases, the priests were going to physical war. Again, this calls to mind the altar and the smoke that rises from it, especially when you add the fire and sulfur which also make us think of smoke. *It isn't that this horde are priests*, but they are doing work that will in fact purify the earth, just like Babylon, an unclean and wicked nation, which gave the land rest as they took the people into captivity for their sins.

But the imagery is strange, isn't it? They *kill with fire, smoke, and brimstone*? (That's not the strange part.) Notice how they do it? This is not a war of swords, but a *war of words*. "Mouths" is repeated twice. In fact, the whole thing forms a chiasm with a missing final A'.

- A. The heads of the horses as heads of lions
- B. And out of their *mouths*
- C. Proceed
- D. Fire and smoke and brimstone
- E. From the three plagues, these,
- F. Are killed**
- E'. A third of men
- D'. Out of the fire and the smoke and the brimstone
- C'. That proceeds
- B'. Out of their *mouths*.⁶

⁶ *Peter J. Leithart, Revelation*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, vol. 1, The International Theological Commentary on the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments (London;

This in turn leads us straight to a second chiasm as the description finishes. “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” (19).

- A. For the authority of the horses
 - B. Is in their **mouth** (note the singular)
 - C. And in their tails**
 - C'. For their tails are like serpents**
 - B'. Having **heads**
- A'. And with these they harm.⁷

Again, notice how they kill with *their mouth*. What kind of an army kills with their mouth? A satanic army; a demonic army! Sticks and stones can break your bones, but words *can very much* also hurt you! What people say matters immensely. Lies destroy.

Just here, the second chiasm adds something very important. They also harm **with their tails**. But their tails are in fact also **heads**. *Serpents'* heads! The tail of the rattlesnake never hurt anyone. But his teeth sure do. It is interesting that the Apostle, in his great litany of total depravity from head

Oxford; New York; New Delhi; Sydney: Bloomsbury; Bloomsbury T&T Clark: An Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2018), 386–387.

⁷ Leithart, 387.

to foot, begins with the head saying, “Their *throat* is an open grave; they use their *tongues* to deceive. The venom of asps is under their *lips*. Their *mouth* is full of curses and bitterness” (Rom 3:13). In this way, no one is good, not even one (12).

He (using OT quotations) likens human sin to satanic, serpentine evil. We resemble the serpent. Serpents remind us of Satan, the devil, the serpent who deceived Eve and brought ruin and misery upon the human race because of his lies and deceptions. Because of this, one might even say we are by nature related to him.

Think again on the composite nature of these “horses.” These are not earthly horses. They have lion’s heads. They have serpents as tails. This is just like the composite nature of the locusts we saw in the parallel, which were not mere locusts, but had scorpion tails. So, these are hideous looking monsters. Demons.

Serpents and scorpions. Where have we see this before? As we saw last time, Luke 10 is worth thinking about. “The seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!’ And he said to them, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.

Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:17-20). Serpent and scorpions are sandwiched between demons, Satan, and the evil spirits. Serpents and scorpions are in fact images of demonic evil. And with their mouths in full view, it is the evil that comes through words, lies, falsehood, false doctrine, and so on. Yes, those words obviously can turn violent in the physical world, but that isn’t the focus here. We’ve seen the physical destruction earlier. Here, the emphasis is on the mouth.

Why has God sent these creatures now not merely to torment, but to kill a third of mankind? The passage concludes with the answer. “The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts” (Rev 9:20-21). If the rest of mankind didn’t repent of these things, then it presupposes that the plagues were sent because of those things.

So what are these things exactly? Let’s focus on a couple points. First, we have basic violations of the Ten

Commandments. False gods (First), idols (Second), murders (6th), sexual immorality (7th), thefts (8th). If we look at this chiastically, then the works of their hands is parallel to these great sins (see below). The works are not good works or even mixed good and bad works. They are simply evil works. Sins.

- a. The rest of men who were not killed with these plagues
 - b. did not repent of **the works of their hands**
 - c. to not prostrate themselves before demons and **idols**
 - of gold
 - of silver
 - of brass
 - of stone
 - of wood
 - which cannot see or hear or walk
 - b'. and **did not repent**
 - c'. of their **murders**
 - nor **sorceries**
 - nor **harlotry**
 - nor **thefts**⁸

Second, false worship is chiefly in view. The list begins with prostrating themselves before **demons!** Hence, god sends the plague of demons to them. That's an **eye for an**

⁸ **Peter J. Leithart**, *Revelation*, The International Theological Commentary on the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments vol. 1, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (London; Oxford; New York; New Delhi; Sydney: Bloomsbury; Bloomsbury T&T Clark: An Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2018), 393.

eye. This demonic worship is further identified as **idolatry** which includes all the basic elements of the idols: gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood. There is a focus here on how they cannot see or hear or talk. That is not a statement about the ontological existence of fallen spiritual beings, but rather upon their spiritual deadness, just like when the Apostle says that we are “**dead in our sins.**” We are not literally dead, but spiritually dead. We will see more of this in a moment.

Finally, someone has noticed that this is not just raw material; it is the material used **to make the tabernacle** (**Ex 24:12; 25:3; 5**; etc.).⁹ In this way, you can add to the point that the sins all center on false worship, whether that is specific things like temple idolatry, temple prostitution, and so on, or self-worship which disregards God’s laws. This takes us full circle to being in heaven near the altar when the word is given to the four angels.

Demonic Worship or the Worship of Heaven?

This finishes our chapter. As we conclude, I want us to think about the **theological meaning** of God sending demonic hordes to lie to people, to give them false teaching, to entrap them in any manner of horrors that come from

⁹ **James B. Jordan**, *The Handwriting on the Wall: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Atlanta: American Vision, 2007). Cited in Leithart, 393.

lying words, and so on. This is not only the focus of the Serppolions, but also of the Scorcusts. Remember, both begin and end with some kind of supernatural idea. To do this, I want to remember the parallel with the fifth trumpet and then begin by pointing out the movement here from heaven to earth to under the earth.

Both trumpets begin in heaven. But whereas the fifth trumpet then **plummets** us below the earth to the abyss of Sheol returns there at the end by telling us the name of its supernatural king, the sixth trumpet focuses our attention on the golden altar of heaven, only to find ourselves at the end **plummeting** downward to death and therefore Sheol because men refuse to worship God. Put another way, the fifth trumpet starts and ends in **hell** while the sixth trumpet begins and ends in **false worship**. Those are parallel. Do you see any kind of application in this without saying anything more? If the two trumpets are paralleling one another, then it is worship that relates directly to the wrath and judgment that is opened up in the abyss. If you do not take God and his worship seriously, then what else is there to expect but judgment from God? And what a terrible judgment.

The Scriptures are, of course, replete with this idea. Think about, for instance, the LORD sending evil spirits to

Saul and other kings because of their sins. “And God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem, and the leaders of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech” (Jdg 9:23); “Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the LORD tormented him” (1Sam 16:14); “And the LORD said to him, 'By what means?' And he said, 'I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so'” (1Kgs 22:22).

Or a different idea. From Cain and Abel which ends in the murder of one and the eternal damnation of the other, to Nadab and Abihu who die before the LORD for their unauthorized worship, to Korah who dies because he demands God choose him, to the kings of Israel who so often die because they lead the people into false worship, to the exile, to the end of the OT, this is a main storyline of the Scripture.

Perhaps the most interesting for our purposes is one of our parallels with John’s Gospel. Jesus has just told the Religious leaders that their Father is the Devil (John 8:44).¹⁰ That’s already interesting. He then tells them that they will not listen to him because he tells the truth (45), but the truth

¹⁰ Johnson uses this exact passage of John throughout his discussion of this chapter. See Dennis Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 151-52.

is not in them, because their father is the father of **lies** (44). That's even more interesting.

The Jews then answered him, “**Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?**” (48). This is where it gets really fascinating. There are two things to look at here. First, **the Samaritan**. Like our horses, a Samaritan is a half-breed, though not of a demonic kind. Although to this day the Samaritans claim descent from Ephraim and Manasseh, 2 Kings seems to describe them as at best half-Jew and half-Gentile, but probably much more Gentile. “**The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah**” and other places “**and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the people of Israel**” (2Kg 17:24). In fact, Josephus and others called them **Cutheans** (*Wars* 2.6).

Interestingly, the Scripture goes on to tell us two more things about them. First, at the beginning of their dwelling there, **they did not fear the LORD**. “**Therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed some of them**” (25). We have seen something very similar in this sixth trumpet. Second, idolatry was in direct focus. They worship the god **Nergal** (30), rather than Yahweh. Curiously, Nergal was pictured as a man with a **lionhead** (see below). This Assyrian deity presided over **the netherworld** and stands at the head

of a special pantheon assigned to the government of the dead. This is identical to what we saw last time with **Apollo-Abaddon**. In fact, **Nergal is Apollo!** Goth are gods of pestilence, plague, war, and the underworld.¹¹ Isn't it interesting how much Samaritans have in common with Revelation 9?



Relief Carving of Nergal,
Hatra, Iraq (1st cent)

Note the scorpion and the serpent to the immediate right of Nergal.

¹¹ “The West Semites identified the Akkadian Nergal with Resheph, also a god of the underworld. By the 4th century B.C. the Cypriots in turn identified Resheph with Apollo in his more negative aspects.” William J. Fulco, “Nergal (Deity),” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1074. Nergal becomes Aplu (meaning “the son of Enlil”) to the Hurrians. This becomes Apaliunas to the Hittites. This becomes Apollo to the Greeks. “Aplu,” *Wikipedia* (and footnotes), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aplu_\(deity\)#cite_note-4](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aplu_(deity)#cite_note-4).

“Nergal was understood by ancient scribes as ‘Lord of the netherworld’” and “a Semitic deity associated with plague, pestilence, war and sudden death.” A. Livingstone, “Nergal,” ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 622.

“Aplu is the Etruscan borrowing of Apollo, who had for the most part lost his healing rose, except when the image was completely lifted from a Greek original, such as Aplu caring for an injured foot of Tinia.” Laura M. Zucconi, *Ancient Medicine: From Mesopotamia to Rome* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019).

Back to John, **second**, they say that **Jesus has a demon**. We saw last time that the Locupian creatures were **demonic**. We have also now seen that the Serppolions are demonic. Is it a coincidence that we have in John 8 and Revelation 9 half-breeds, demons, Satan, (words) lies vs. truth, lions, and false worship in both? That's pretty specific to be a coincidence.

I started out the sermon thinking about **the added depravity** that comes to mankind because of demons. The doctrine of demons. A good example of this is found in 1 Timothy. **“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth” (1Tim 4:1-3)**. These things have an appearance of wisdom, in promoting self-made religion and asceticism, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh (**Col 2:23**). And that's the best of their teachings! As I think we all know, demonic teachings can get much darker, much more wicked than anyone can

possibly imagine without seeing it work out before their eyes.

In John 8, the root of demonic activity is what they see Jesus as *teaching*. It is truth vs. lies. Doctrine and theology. It begins with the mouth. We can think about how the things Jesus taught was constantly causing friction with the Pharisaical reading and doing(!) of the law. Everywhere he went he pointed out the hypocrisy and selective obedience of these whitewashed tombs. Make no mistake, *Jesus is a very real and present danger to their entire religious system*. Indeed, he is to all legalistic works-righteous religions, even those done in the name of Christ. For if you miss Christ, you miss the lawgiver, you miss the one who changes hearts, you miss the one who makes your works acceptable to God.

The Pharisees associate Jesus with false worship and demonic activity. In reality, they are *projecting themselves onto him*. That's often how it works. Jesus answers them, "I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me" (*John 8:49*). He says, "Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge" (*50*). We saw last time the parallel of *seeking and dying* from earlier in John 8 and earlier in Revelation 9. "*You will seek Me, and where I do you cannot come; you will die in your*

sins...” (8:21-22). This paralleled “Men will *seek death*, and will not find it; they will desire to *die*, and death will flee from them” (9:6).

We need to pause and think about this parallel. It is far too easy to see this sixth trumpet as a judgment against total pagans. But Pharisees are not pagans. They were conservative Jewish rabbis. Those Paul references in the last days are not pagans, but churches who are listening to false teachers. This book of Revelation is not written to pagans, but to Christian churches, many of whom are being tempted to listen to false demonic teachings. In other words, who is in mind, really? Pagans or people who profess Christianity but give it up for lies and falsehoods, who have been given over to doctrines of demons? Yes, this is a message to Christ’s churches to beware!

Now we add to this seeking of death. For now, the *Serppolions begin to kill*. But Jesus gives the solution to their depravity and the depravity of the demons add to it. “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death” (John 8:51). Sadly, the Pharisees respond, “Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will

never taste death’” (John 8:52). Again, they take him literally.

Jesus’ response is exactly as he taught his disciples. It’s all about Christ. He said that Abraham saw his day (56). And, in fact, God *is* the God of Abraham. Not he “was,” but he “is,” meaning that Abraham is in fact alive, though he died (58). Perhaps most terrifying of all, is their response. They refused to repent. Instead, “They picked up stones to throw at him” (59a). It is directly parallel to Revelation 9:20-21, “They *did not repent* of the works of their hands (murder), nor give up worshiping demons (their Father is Satan) and religious idols that cannot see nor hear.”

And the climax? Just as we began in the heavenly temple, John tells us, “But Jesus hid himself and went *out of the temple*” (Jn 8:59). He would not be revealed to these people; that is part of their due punishment. The demons had blinded them, making them just like the gods they were ultimately worshiping. For they refused to come to Christ.

And yet.

The next chapter tells us of a blind man. A blind man who, because of Jesus, came to see. The wicked are like their idols “which can neither see nor hear” (Rev 9:20). But the

blind man said, “Though I was *blind*, now I see ... I told you (Pharisees) ... and you did not hear” (John 9:25-27).

Human depravity is a terrible thing. Add to this demonic depravity that works in conjunction, and men are undone. Justly, God sends this demonic activity among men, indeed among those who profess his name but do not truly know him because they are not really worshiping him. In not worshiping the Creator, they worship the creation, things that can not see or hear or speak. But men do it anyway. God overcomes such things through his Word, which is Christ. This is his grace to you. So turn from your sins, from your idolatry, from your hatred, your lust, your coveting. This has been the message to the churches. It continues in the trumpets. This coming judgment comes upon because of sin.

Such a focus on Revelation 9 might not sell as many books as more futuristically oriented prophetic speculations will. But I assure you, it is infinitely more important. May God overcome our depravity through the grave of his Son. May he safeguard his church that the gates of hell might not prevail against her. May he weed out the wheat from the chaff, but do to in a way that has mercy on the wheat. And may all who hear this trumpet blast turn to Christ. For only

in Christ is the veil taken off of our eyes and the filthy garments of sin washed clean in the blood of the lamb.

A. Fifth Trumpet: Star from heaven

B. Bottomless pit opened: Locustion hordes released. To many locusts to count, power like scorpions

C. Do not harm God's people, but torment for five months. Men will long to die

C¹. Description of Locupions

B¹. Tails sting like scorpions, hurt for five months

A¹. Their King: Abaddon/Apollyon

A. Sixth Trumpet: Voice in heaven from golden altar

B. Angels released from Euphrates River. 200,000,000 mounted troops prepared for this day and hour

C. Description of Hippolionerpents

C¹. By these three plagues (fire, smoke, sulfur) 1/3 of mankind killed

B¹. Mouths and tails like serpents, by means of them they wound

A¹. Those who do not die do not repent of worshiping demons and idols

8:21–22 “you will **seek** Me, and *where I go you cannot come* (i.e., you will not find Me); You will **die** in your sins ... (they) said, ‘Will He kill Himself?’

9:6 “men will **seek** death, and *will not find it*; they will desire to **die**, and death will flee from them”

8:44, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 59 “You are of your father, the **Devil** ... He was a **murderer** ... he is the father of **lies**” ... “whoever hears the **words** of God” ... “Are we not right in saying that you are a **Samaritan** and have a **demon**?” ... “I do not have a **demon**, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. Yet I do not **seek** my own glory; there is One who **seeks** it” ... “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my **word**, he will never see **death**” ... “So they **picked up stones to throw at him**, but Jesus hid himself and went out of **the temple**.”

9:13, 15, 17, 20, 21 “A voice from the four horns of the **golden altar** before God” ... “**kill** a third of mankind” ... “out of their **mouths**” ... “**did not repent** of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping **demons and idols** ... which cannot **see or hear or walk** ... or their **murders**”

9:25, 27 “Though I was blind, now I **see** ... I told you (the Pharisees) ... and you did not **hear**”

9:20 The wicked are like their idols “which can neither **see** nor **hear**”

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