

The Grace of Wrath

Studies in the Revelation of Jesus Christ

Text

Chapter 9:1-21

Topic

Two terrifying demon armies are unleashed upon the inhabitants of earth in an effort to lead men to turn to God from idols

Title

"I Double-Demon Scare Ya' "

Introduction

Scared Straight! is a 1978 documentary about a group of juvenile delinquents and their three-hour session with actual convicts.

Filmed at Rahway State Prison in New Jersey, the inmates berate, scream at, curse at, and generally terrify the young offenders in an attempt to "scare them straight" so that those teenagers will avoid prison life.

(Occasionally even the camera operators are targeted by the inmates for getting in too close.)

My dad often employed a "scared straight" philosophy of child-raising. After he caught me with marijuana (in Junior High), he drove me into a crime-infested part of San Bernardino called Waterman Gardens, and told me that was where I would end up by smoking pot.

It was, to say the least, *ineffective*. Truth is, people are generally not scared straight.

I would cite a 2002 study of the results of a number of scared straight and similar programs which found that they *increased* crime rates, leading to higher reoffense rates than in control groups that did not receive the intervention.

There's something like *Scared Straight!* in Revelation chapter nine.

Two demon-armies are released upon the earth during the Tribulation:

1. The first one is "not given authority to kill [men], but to torment them for five months."
2. The second one **is** instructed to "kill a third of mankind."

If you think that the rest of the human race will be 'scared straight' to Jesus, you're wrong.

Rev 9:20 But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk.

Rev 9:21 And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Really?? Demons first torment, then kill, human beings, and the rest of mankind steadfastly *refuses* to seek the protection of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

These invasions are real, and will occur exactly as narrated, during the Tribulation. We will already have been resurrected and raptured; we, i.e., believers in the church age, will be safe in Heaven.

Nevertheless we can find application for ourselves today. I'll organize my thoughts around two questions we ought to ponder: #1 Do You Understand That Demons Desire To Rob You Of Life?, and #2 Do You Understand That Demons Are Determined To Kill You In Death?

#1 Do You Understand That Demons Desire To Rob You Of Life?

(v1-12)

I can anticipate the argument, "How can a God of love give His permission for demons to first torment, then kill, human beings?"

Remember what I just read about those Tribulation human beings. *They openly worship demons.*

You could say God is giving them exactly what they want; and that He is doing so for their own **good** - to lead them to repentance.

Have you seen the latest anti-smoking ad campaign on TV? It's called *The Real Cost?* In one ad a guy tries to buy a pack of smokes, but the clerk tells him his money is "not enough." So the smoker grabs a pair of pliers, and rips out one of his teeth, adding it to his payment. The narrator says something like, "What does smoking really cost? Your teeth."

What is it really like to be an idolator and to worship demons?
We're about to see.

Rev 9:1 Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit.

Jesus took a seven-sealed scroll from His Father. One-by-one He opened the seals, initiating the seven-year Tribulation upon the inhabitants of earth.

When Jesus opened the seventh seal, about mid-way into the seven years, seven trumpets began to sound, one following the other.

The first four trumpet judgments affected the natural world. The next three involve supernatural phenomena.

This fifth trumpet commands "a star fallen from Heaven to the earth." This "star" is some type of person because he is "given the key to the bottomless pit."

"Star" is a term sometimes used to refer to angels, both good and fallen. I think this "star" is Satan. When we get to chapter twelve, we learn more about the devil being cast out of Heaven to the earth:

Rev 12:9 So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Chapter twelve goes on to describe Satan trying to exterminate all the Jews on planet earth for a period of three and one-half years, which tells us that the fifth trumpet sounds mid-way through the Tribulation.

Satan is thrown to the earth with a key to the bottomless pit. The Greek word is *abussos*; our word is abyss. It seems to exist as a chamber in the center of the earth. That explains why it is bottomless - If you're encircled by a sphere, the only direction is up. There is no floor, or bottom, only a ceiling.

Revelation 9:2 And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit.

You can't find the abyss; it exists in the dimension of the supernatural. That's not to say that it isn't real; *it is all too real!*

It's a prison for demons. It's the Pelican Bay of supernatural corrections. In other portions of Scripture you read of fallen angels already incarcerated there:

2 Peter 2:4 For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment;

Jud 1:6 And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day;

Who are these angels who sinned, who are reserved in chains? They are not the one-third of the angels who originally rebelled with Satan, because they are still loose.

They are probably the angels who sinned in Genesis chapter six by cohabiting with human women just prior to Noah's flood. God punished them early by confining them to the abyss. The word "hell" is the Greek *tartarus* and is used to describe a chamber in the abyss where these fallen angels – these demons - are detained.

In the famous episode where Jesus commanded the legion of demons to leave the man and enter the herd of pigs, they begged the Lord to not send them to the abyss (Luke 8:31).

Revelation 9:3 Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.

You know they are not insects because you are told in verse eleven that they have a king over them. Proverbs 30:27 says that insect locusts have no king.

This is an army of demons whose behavior is *like* that of a plague of locusts - **only their prey is human beings.**

They apparently are given bodies that have been prepared for them to inhabit that are locust-like. We'll see them described more fully in a moment.

Revelation 9:4 They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

Their food is to torment men. They swarm into cities and attack people.

Who are those "who have the seal of God on their foreheads?" In chapter seven 144,000 Jews were specially sealed by God for their ministry of evangelism. These for sure will be spared from the torments of these demons.

What about other believers on the earth? The text doesn't say, but I believe that they, too, will be spared. Scripture says in Second Timothy 2:19,

2 Timothy 2:19 Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His..."

Nonbelievers on the earth during the Great Tribulation will be the prey of this demon invasion, and they will be tormented as described in verses five and six:

Revelation 9:5 And they were not given *authority* to kill them, but to torment them *for* five months. Their torment *was* like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man.

Revelation 9:6 In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them.

We don't know the significance of five months. Some commentators suggest it mimics the life span of locusts; but I'm not sure why that means anything.

It is gracious of God to not allow it to continue beyond a set period of time.

Suicide and assisted suicide will be impossible. I can't imagine what that means, but it will be awful.

I don't want to point out the obvious, but the men and women affected will be - are you ready for it - **the undead**. They will be a type of zombie.

There isn't going to be a zombie apocalypse - *but there will be zombies in the apocalypse.*

John described the bodies of the demons:

Revelation 9:7 The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces *were* like the faces of men.

Revelation 9:8 They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' *teeth*.

Revelation 9:9 And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings *was* like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle.

Revelation 9:10 They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power *was* to hurt men five months.

Notice John's use of the word "like" throughout his description. These are demons, in locust-like bodies, and they look "like" these things.

I don't think this was John's way of describing a helicopter or other modern instrument of warfare. This is not man fighting man. It is a demonic attack upon man.

Revelation 9:11 And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew *is* Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon.

Satan opens the abyss. Within it is the angel of the bottomless pit, himself incarcerated. His Hebrew and Greek names mean *destruction*. He is the leader of this first demon army that is released.

There is nothing here to indicate Abaddon rules while he is incarcerated. He's not the warden of the abyss. But, when released, he leads this invasion.

Bob Dylan was accurate when he sang,

*It may be the devil,
Or it may be the Lord;
But you gotta serve somebody*

When you were a nonbeliever; or if you are one today; you may not realize it, but you are serving the devil.

The Bible, in one place, says you are taken captive by him, to do his will (Second Timothy 2:26).

The Bible goes so far as to say that, as a nonbeliever, you worship the devil second-hand by the idols you have in your life; and that you become just like your idols. After describing idols as dumb, lifeless things, in Psalm 115:8 it says, **"Those who make them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them."**

People laugh at this talk of dumb idols, saying that they have no such figurines in their homes that they bow down before. But such objects are only one possible manifestation of idolatry. At the end of this chapter, we're going to see a list of practices that are idols among mankind - "murders," "sorceries," "sexual immoralities," and "thefts."

Here's my point: Demons rob you of real life. Jesus put it plainly when He said of Satan, "the thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

It's one, or the other. Either you have abundant, spiritual life in Jesus; or you're robbed of it by Satan.

This first demon invasion, while all too real, serves to illustrate what it's really like to be robbed by Satan. If you could see yourself, you'd know you were the walking dead.

Rev 9:12 One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things.

There is a pause; mankind is given a break, in order to respond. To repent, which is God's will for them.

Look closely at the description of human beings tormented by demons in the Tribulation. **It is a picture of all nonbelievers, in any age, who are taken captive by the devil to do his will.**

The torment you experience now, bound by sin, may not seem as extreme as being physically tormented by locust-like demons. But it is, and you see that it is in too many ruined lives.

Let's say you are a believer; most of us are. **Demons don't discriminate.** They want just as much to ruin *your* life as they do the lives of nonbelievers. In fact they'd prefer to bring you down, so as to bring shame to the name of Jesus.

You have victory over them, because of what Jesus accomplished on the Cross. But you can surrender your position of victory by giving yourself over to your flesh, or to the things of the world.

Christians can have idols; and, when we do, we are serving Satan rather than Jesus, to the ruination of our witness, to the loss of our rewards in Heaven, and to the gross failure of our lives on earth.

Check yourself for idolatry. All the time. Be sure Jesus remains the supreme passion of your life, and your first love.

#2 Do You Understand That Demons Are Determined To Kill You In Death?

(v13-21)

What's worse than an army of demons let loose from the abyss with the power to torment you for five months?

A second army of demons released from the Euphrates River with the power to kill you.

Revelation 9:13 Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,

The golden altar is the place previously where the prayers of all the saints were offered. Jesus wants you to realize that your prayer, "Thy kingdom come," is going to find its fulfillment. He will return at the end of the Tribulation and establish His kingdom.

We are not told whose voice rings forth from the golden altar. Whoever it is, we understand that demons cannot do anything more than God will permit. Though it may seem He gives them too much freedom, we really see how much He holds them back.

Revelation 9:14 saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."

These are four powerful demons, since angels who did not join Satan's rebellion are not "bound."

Somewhere in the Euphrates is another demon prison within which especially wicked demons are incarcerated. There's no reason to think the Bible doesn't mean this literally.

Their release is terrible:

Revelation 9:15 So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind.

"Prepared for" means that God would use them at this time and for this purpose.

God is *never* the author or creator of evil. It's a petty criticism to blame God for evil since He could have created a world in which it was not possible. But in such a world free will would also have been impossible. Love would have been impossible.

The first demon army wounded and tormented but was not allowed to kill. Why? **To give men the opportunity to repent before the second army came to kill.**

One-fourth of the earth's population was killed earlier. Now another one-third.

Revelation 9:16 Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.

Later in the Revelation, in chapter sixteen, a reference is made to the Euphrates River drying up so that a two hundred million-man army from the east can arrive at the final battle of mankind, Armageddon. *These are two distinct events.* Here in chapter nine we are seeing a demon army of two hundred million under the command of the first four demons.

John gives the graphic details:

Revelation 9:17 And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone.

It is a mounted cavalry, but these are no ordinary horses. They are riding terrifying beast-like steeds.

Revelation 9:18 By these three *plagues* a third of mankind was killed - by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths.

You're told a second time a third of mankind was killed. I see it as **only** a third. It's clear this army has the power to kill all but is not allowed to do so.

It's as if God is saying to the inhabitants of earth, "Hello. My name is Jehovah. You killed my Son. *Prepare to die.*"

Revelation 9:19 For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails *are* like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm.

What's worse than a scorpion's tail? Having a tail that is a serpent, complete with its own head and fangs and poison.

The devil is not just a thief. He is also a murderer. He isn't out just to kill people. He wants to kill them with a death that lasts forever.

These invasions are permitted by God; but they are, in a very real sense, the consummation of the activities of the inhabitants on earth.

There's a line of dialog from the miniseries, *Lonesome Dove*, that seems to fit: "If you ride with outlaws, **you die with outlaws.**"

Worship demons and you will come to a bad end.

Revelation 9:20 But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk.

Revelation 9:21 And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Even after being shown exactly what demon-worship leads to, men refuse to turn to God from idols.

Demons are on the loose today. They don't have the blanket authority to torment and kill. What they largely do is influence to evil.

As you look around at our world, their influence seem to be succeeding.

Idolatry is what is being described by the phrase "the works of their hands... the worship of demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk."

Do people really practice idolatry?

First of all, think beyond our own culture here in the West. *Most of the rest of the world openly worships idols.* There are millions of Hindu gods. They are demons; i.e., demons empower them.

More and more, even in the West, we are succumbing to demonic influence. Occult practices are everywhere - even in the church.

"Murders" are an influence of demons we can succumb to. We have legalized murder in the practice and promotion of abortion on demand. Is there any doubt that assisted suicide will become commonplace - barring a genuine revival?

"Sorceries" are an influence of demons we can succumb to. The word is *pharmakeia*, the word we translate "pharmacy." The use of drugs is what is being described. Do we have a drug problem? It is the covert influence of demons.

"Sexual immorality" is an influence of demons we can succumb to. This encompasses **all** sexual sin, not just ones we think are the worst. It includes any sex outside of heterosexual biblical marriage, e.g., premarital sex, adultery, and pornography, just as much as it includes homosexuality.

"Thefts" could be translated *dishonesties*. It would include the breaking down of absolute standards. It alludes to abandoning the absolutes in God's Word and living by watered-down laws of men rather than the laws of God.

Demons don't have to invade to kill with death. They can influence to deceive, and achieve just as great a victory.

By "kill with death," I'm talking about what the Bible calls "the second death." If you die without turning to Jesus Christ, you will be raised from the dead to die the second death, which is to be cast alive into the Lake of Fire to experience eternal conscious torment.

God isn't trying to scare you straight; but He is giving you straight talk.

If you're not a believer, He's showing you what you look like as a dupe of the devil.

If you are a believer, He's reminding you of the abundant spiritual life that is yours as you pursue holiness in your walk with Him.