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End-Time Demonic Activities in the Book of Revelation

This paper deals with the subject of end-time demonic activities in the world in the Book of Revelation. In particular, it explores two texts in Revelation that are relevant to this subject in their relation to each other: the vision of the fifth and sixth trumpets in chapter 9 and the scene of the sixth bowl plague in 16:13–14.

Meaning of the Seven Trumpets

In order to understand the full spectrum of the scene of the fifth and sixth trumpets, it is important to reflect briefly on the meaning of the seven trumpets in general. To begin with, we must keep in mind that the seven trumpets are among the most difficult to interpret of the prophecies of Revelation. The major disagreement among historicist scholars today is regarding the historical application of the trumpets, particularly the fifth and sixth trumpets. The most extensive treatment of the vision of the seven trumpets in Revelation is probably found in Jon Paulien's doctoral dissertation, "Decoding Revelation's Trumpets" (1987), although Paulien's study deals with the nature and meaning of the trumpets in general, its focus was limited specifically to the first four trumpets. Among Seventh-day Adventist scholars, there are two major views regarding their meaning and historical fulfillment.

Starting with Uriah Smith, the fifth and sixth trumpets have been traditionally interpreted to describe the medieval and post-medieval military history of Islam. However, the majority of Adventist apocalyptic scholars today hold that the fifth and sixth trumpets describe the spiritual condition of the Western world during the post-enlightenment period, which was characterized by atheism and secularism.

Interestingly, the Daniel and Revelation Committee avoided taking an interpretative stand on either side. The committee simply stated that the

trumpets describe sequential events in history that will take place before the Second Coming of Christ.

The significance of the sixth trumpet in particular is found in the fact that this is the only section of Revelation that adequately describes the situation in the secular world at the time of the end, and, as such, stands in close relationship with Rev 16:13–14. Unfortunately, its meaning and relevance for the time in which we live today has been significantly (if not totally) obscured by the Muslim interpretation, which is based on an allegorical reading of Revelation's symbols.

In the current understanding, the seven trumpets point to God's interventions in history as they herald his judgments upon a world hostile to God and his people. They are structurally organized into pairs that complement each other. Their historical fulfillment is best understood in light of this structural complementary pairing. (For a detailed analysis of the historical application of the trumpets see Stefanovic 2009:281–323, 365–370; Stefanovic 2013:101–117, 133–136; LaRondelle 1997:161–195; Doukhan 2002:77–91.)

The first two trumpets herald God's judgments on the two nations involved in the death of Jesus and the subsequent persecution of his followers, specifically the early church. Thus, the first trumpet (8:7) describes the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70–72, and the second trumpet (8:8–9) describes the demise of the Roman Empire.

The next two trumpets describe the situation during the medieval and post-medieval period. In today's interpretation, the third trumpet (8:10–11) refers to the medieval apostasy and its consequences. The fourth trumpet (8:12) describes the situation in the world in the post-medieval period. During this time the Age of Reason led to the rise of secularism, which was characterized by rationalism, the denial of supernaturalism, and skepticism toward religious faith.

The fifth and sixth trumpets describe the dreadful situation in the world under the prevailing effects of secularism. Thus, the fifth trumpet (9:1–12) depicts the deepening spiritual darkness of the time and its consequences in the world following the Age of Enlightenment, portrayed in the fourth trumpet. The sixth trumpet (9:13–21) describes an escalation of the demonic activities in the world leading up to the battle of Armageddon.

Before the seventh angel heralds his trumpet, there is an interlude (10:1–11:14). This interlude is related to the one between the sixth and seventh seal that identifies God's end-time people who will be alive at the time of the Second Coming. The interlude between the fifth and sixth trumpets describes the role, task, and experience of God's people in the world at the time of the end. Finally, the seventh trumpet (11:15–18) heralds the Second Coming and ushers in God's everlasting kingdom.

The Fifth Trumpet

Since the fifth trumpet scene builds on the previous trumpet, it is necessary to briefly comment on the meaning and historical implications of the fourth trumpet. The fourth trumpet describes the situation of the Western world in the post-medieval period. The Reformation of the sixteenth century brought to an end medieval religious dominance. It rediscovered the gospel and restored the Bible as the rule of faith and teaching. Very soon, however, the Reformers were succeeded by a lifeless generation of so-called Protestant scholasticism, which was characterized by theological polemics and controversies.

Such a situation had a mortifying effect upon Christianity. The intellectual revolution in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries ended the prominence of faith and led to the rise of rationalism, skepticism, humanism, and liberalism, which, as a result, gave birth to secularism. Despite its positive impact on science, politics, religious liberty, arts, and education, with its materialistic orientation and denial of supernaturalism, secularism gradually eroded Christian faith and robbed millions of the hope of salvation. The fourth trumpet scene thus describes the dreadful consequences of the darkening of the spiritual source of the true light under the prevailing influence of secularism.

The fourth trumpet concludes with a special warning proclaimed by a vulture flying in the sky announcing loudly: "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!" (Rev 8:13 NASB). Much worse is yet to come. The fifth trumpet signifies the deepening of the spiritual darkness in the Western world and its dreadful consequences upon humanity following the Enlightenment as pictured in the fourth trumpet.

The Demonic Locusts (9:1–6)

At the sound of the fifth trumpet, John the Revelator sees a star that has fallen from heaven to the earth (Rev 9:1). This star is undoubtedly the same one spoken of in the third trumpet poisoning the streams and springs of water (8:10–11). The English verb conjugation "has fallen" is in the perfect tense, which suggests that the fall of the star took place sometime before the heralding of the fifth trumpet. This falling of the star is a direct allusion to the falling of Satan, the morning star in Isaiah 14:12 (see also Luke 10:18; Rev 12:9; for the biblical and extra-biblical evidence see Beale 1999:491–492; Collins 1979:60). In Revelation, there is a description of Satan's present condition as the one who has lost his position in heaven (Hendriksen 1997:120). In verse 11, he is identified as "the angel of the abyss" and the leader of the demonic army. Paul calls him "the prince of the power in the air" (Eph 2:2).

2015, vol. 11 no. 2

The star was given “the key of the abyss.” The passive form (“was given”) functions here as the Hebrew divine passive, meaning that the fallen star was given the key of the abyss by God. *Passivum divinum* or divine passive was very common in Judaism. Jews believed that God’s name was too sacred to be uttered, except in rare circumstances. When talking about God or his actions, they usually expressed it in a passive form. For instance, “You are blessed,” meant clearly, “God has blessed you.” The divine passive form is used often in the book of Revelation.

The abyss (Gr. *abyssos*) is the place of temporary confinement of Satan and the fallen angels. This has been their abode since their expulsion from heaven, and will continue to be until they receive their punishment (Luke 8:31; 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6). The word “abyss” is used first in Gen 1:2 with reference to the chaotic condition of the earth before the Creation. In Jer 4:23–30, it is used to refer to desolated and uninhabited Palestine during the Exile. In the New Testament, the abyss is described as a dark and chaotic prison for the fallen angels or demons, who are under God’s control (Luke 8:31; 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6; Rev 20:1, 3). In Revelation it is the place from which the beast arises (Rev 11:7; 17:8). The abyss is also the place of Satan’s imprisonment during the millennium (Rev 20:1–3) until he receives his final punishment in the lake of fire (20:10). As a result of the confinement of Satan and the fallen angels, their freedom and activities are restricted. In the fifth trumpet scene, however, the restriction is removed, giving the demonic forces partial freedom to perform their harmful activities.

As the star opens the bottomless pit, a massive smoke of locusts emerges resembling “the smoke of a great furnace” (9:2). In the Bible, locusts are a symbol of judgment (see Stefanovic 2009:307). However, these are clearly not ordinary locusts. Their power is compared to the power of scorpions (9:3; also in v. 5; on the figurative use of scorpions in the OT see 1 Kgs 12:11 and 14). This brings to mind Jesus’ statement in which he likens demons to scorpions in connection with Satan’s fall from heaven:

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.” (Luke 10:17–19)

One may easily see the verbal parallels between this passage from Luke and Rev 9:1–3. The fact that the scorpion-like locusts of the fifth trumpet come out of the abyss, as the prison-abode of the demonic forces, suggests that they are the symbols of supernatural demonic forces which were previously confined and restrained, but now are unleashed to perform their harmful activities in the world as it nears its end.

The locusts of the fifth trumpet must be understood as symbolic. This is evident first because they have the power of scorpions (9:3, 5); they have tails like scorpions, and poisonous stings (9:10). While locusts normally attack plants; the locusts of the fifth trumpet, however, hurt not plants but people. Finally, their description as armies advancing like a cloud, darkening the sky, and sounding like the rattle of chariots is drawn from Joel's vision of the locust invasion on Judah as a judgment from God (cf. Joel 2:2–10).

This gigantic smoke of demonic locusts creates thick darkness in the sky, as the darkness of the fourth trumpet deepens (8:12). This reminds us of the locust plague on Egypt (Exod 10:14–15). The scene also echoes the prophecy of Joel in which the locust plague causes the darkening of the sun, the moon, and the stars (2:2, 10). With the demonic locusts, spiritual darkness covers the earth. Darkness is the opposite of light. Since light in the Bible stands for the gospel (Col 1:13; John 8:12; 12:46), the darkness symbolizes the absence of the gospel. Jesus said: "This is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and the men loved the darkness rather than the light" (John 3:19; cf. Mic 3:6). The demonic locusts of the fifth trumpet have obliterated the light of the gospel, replacing it with rationalism and human materialistic philosophies that have become the ultimate standards of truth. As a result, Christ and the gospel have been extinguished from the lives of most people in the world. What follows is spiritual torment and mental anguish with devastating effects.

The demonic locusts "were given" to do their harmful activities. The use of the passive form ("were given") here functions as the Hebrew divine passive, suggesting divine action. Here, in the scene of the fifth trumpet, God uses the demonic forces as his instruments of judgment (Doukhan 2002:86–87; Osborne 2002:383). However, the demonic forces are not allowed to harm "the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree," but only those "who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads" (9:4). Grass and other green things stand here in contrast to those who do not have the seal of God (cf. 7:1–3). Beale argues forcibly that the fifth trumpet "woe is directed against rebellious humanity and not nature (1999:496). Grass and trees in the OT are frequent symbols for God's people. Trees (Ps 1:3; 52:8; 92:12–14; Isa 61:3; Jer 11:15–17; 17:7–8; Ezek 20:46–48) and green grass (Ps 72:16; Isa 40:6–8; 44:2–4) are in the Old Testament used figuratively with reference to Israel as God's covenant people. The New Testament writers confirm the association. For instance, John the Baptist compared the apostate leaders of the Jewish people to trees that did not bear good fruit (Matt 3:10). Likewise, Jesus used tree symbolism in referring to the Jewish people as the green tree (Luke 23:28–31) and as a fig tree that did not bear fruit (Luke 13:6–9; cf. Matt 7:17–19; 21:18–19). God's people are thus protected from the demonic harmful activities by the seal of God.

These demonic locusts are not permitted to kill people, only to torment them for five months. Among historicist interpreters, there is disagreement concerning the specific number of years covered by this prophetic period. The period of five months in Rev 9:5 and 10 has been variously interpreted. First, as the life span of locusts is five months; the harm of this plague would therefore include one entire generation of locusts. Second, it has been explained through historical interpretation based on the day/year principle. All of these proposals are untenable and problematic however. The most likely Old Testament background is the Genesis Flood story, where a five-month period is mentioned twice, just as in the scene of the fifth trumpet (Gen 7:24; 8:3). It is most likely that John describes the demonic locusts harming the earth and its inhabitants for five months after the Flood story. The best way to understand this five-month period allotted to the demonic locusts is in connection to the period of the Flood during which Noah and his family were under the divine protection from the floodwaters (Gen 7:24; 8:3). The torment of the demonic locusts is spiritual and mental, driving people into suicidal anguish; “men will seek death and will not find it” (v. 6).

The Description of the Locusts (9:7–11)

Having described the origin of the demonic locusts and their activities, John now describes their appearance, which is obviously indescribable. In picturing them, John uses eight figurative analogies: their appearance is like horses ready for battle; they appear as wearing golden crowns; they have human-like faces and hair like women; their teeth are like those of lions; they have iron-like breastplates; with their wings they produce the sound of chariots rushing to battle; and they have the scorpion-like tails by which they sting.

In describing the demonic locusts, John draws from Joel’s description of the locusts swarming on Judah with devastating consequences:

For a nation has invaded my land, mighty and without number; its teeth are the teeth of a lion, and it has the fangs of a lioness. . . . For the day of the Lord is coming; surely it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, so there is a great and mighty people. . . . Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; and like war horses, so they run. With a noise as of chariots, they leap on the tops of the mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire consuming the stubble, like a mighty people arranged for battle. . . . They ran like mighty men, they climb the wall like soldiers; and each march in line. . . . They rush on the city, they run on the walls, they climb into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief. Before them the earthquakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon grow dark, and the stars

lose their brightness. The Lord utters His voice before His army, surely His camp is very great; for strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome; who can endure it? (1:6; 2:2–11)

By drawing the locust imagery from Joel, John the Revelator describes the demonic forces operating in the world near the end of history. As in Joel's prophecy, the demonic locusts of the fifth trumpet resemble a vast army. Yet, they are not a real army, for their activity is not military, but rather spiritual. "These forces may exhibit themselves through institutions or individuals, but their effect is devastating" (Tucker 2007:86). Their weapons are tails like scorpions containing stings to afflict people (v. 10). In the Bible, the tail is a symbol of deception. Isaiah refers to false prophets deceiving people with their false teaching in terms of the tail (9:14–15). In Rev 12:4, the tail of the dragon caused one third of the heavenly beings to rebel against God.

In contrast to locusts who have no leader (Prov 30:27), this locust-like demonic army has a leader who is identified as "the angel of the abyss." His name in Hebrew is *Abaddon* (destruction), and in Greek *Apollyon* (destroyer). This demonic leader is undoubtedly Satan himself, "the ruler of demons" (Matt 12:24) and "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph 2:2), the fallen star from heaven to whom is given authority over the abyss (Rev 9:1). His followers are referred to as the "destroyers of the earth" (Rev 11:18).

The fifth trumpet scene concludes with the statement: "The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things" (9:12). While the woe of the fifth trumpet is frightening, the worst is yet to come with the sixth and seventh trumpets.

The Sixth Trumpet

The sixth trumpet builds on the fifth trumpet by showing further developments in demonic activities as the situation further escalates.

Release of the Demonic Army (9:13–15)

At the sound of the sixth trumpet, John hears a voice from the golden altar of incense in the heavenly temple ordering the angel with the sixth trumpet to release "the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates" (9:13–14). The four angels that are to be released correspond to the four angels restraining the destroying winds from blowing until the appointed time in Rev 7:1–3 (see Beale 1999:507).

The evidence show that there are corresponding parallels between the four angels "bound at the great river Euphrates" and the same four angels

of Rev 7:1–3. While in Rev 7 the four angels are holding firmly the four winds of the earth, so that the wind should not blow upon the earth, the four angels in Rev 9 restrain the armies of the horsemen. In Rev 7:3 they are ordered not to harm the earth until the servants of God have been sealed, in the scene of the sixth trumpet they are released “that they might kill the third part of humankind” (9:15, 18). This suggests that the destructive winds restrained by the four angels in Rev 7:1–3 correspond to the horsemen—the demonic forces—in the scene of the sixth trumpet (Rev 9:16–19).

The Euphrates River in the OT was the boundary that separated God’s people from their enemies, Assyria and Babylon (Isa 7:20; Jer 46:10). The enemies of God’s people came from this great river. The attack by these enemy nations was often described in terms of the overflowing waters of the Euphrates sweeping over the land of Judah (Isa 8:7–8).

The four angels are ready to release the demonic forces for “the hour and day and month and year” (9:15). This expression refers to a specific point in time appointed by God when the angels are released “to kill a third of mankind,” namely, a part of Satan’s kingdom. This divinely appointed time has come. Verse 18 shows that the demonic forces, not the angels, are the ones doing the killing. In the fifth trumpet, the demonic agencies have been under God’s restraints, and allowed only to afflict people (9:4–6); but now, they are unleashed to both kill and afflict those who are alive.

John sees the demonic forces as a huge army of two hundred million cavalry troops appearing on the scene (9:16). This is undoubtedly a symbolic number expressing an incalculable number. The expression, “I heard the number of them” mirrors the same phrase in Rev 7:4:

Rev 7:4	Rev 9:16
“And I heard the number of those who have been sealed, 144,000 sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel.”	“And the number of the army of horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.”

The parallel between these two text shows that the number 200 million stands in contrast to the sealed 144,000 of God’s end-time people (see Rev 7:4). The demonic locusts that were afflicting human beings in the fifth trumpet have now grown into a huge monstrous army that kills human beings and are ready to engage in the final conflict referred to as the battle of Armageddon (see Rev 16:12–16).

The Description of the Demonic Army (9:16–19)

The features and characteristics of the horses and their riders in the sixth trumpet are very similar to those of the horse-like locusts in the fifth. The contextual evidence suggests that the horsemen of the sixth trumpet are the demonic locusts of the fifth trumpet. The appearance of the demonic locusts was like horses prepared for battle (9:7, 9). They came out of the abyss (9:2–3), while the horsemen come from the river Euphrates, the symbolic boundary between God’s people and their enemies. The harmful activity of the horsemen of the sixth trumpet shows a further intensification of the destructive demonic activity that began with the coming of the locusts in the fifth trumpet. That said, there are some basic differences between them:

- While the riders on the horses in the fifth trumpet had lion’s teeth (9:8); now the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions (v. 17).
- In the fifth trumpet, they have breastplates of iron (9:9); now those breastplates become fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfurous yellow, which is a reflection of fire, smoke, and sulfur emanating from the horses’ mouths (vv. 17–18).
- The horsemen of the fifth trumpet used tails as their weaponry (9:10); now both the tails and the mouth are the source of their power (v. 19).
- In the fifth trumpet, the tails of the demonic forces are scorpion-like, now they are serpent-like. For a metaphoric association of serpents and scorpions in Judaism see Beale 1999:515–517.
- In the fifth trumpet, the demonic locusts were allowed to only afflict and torment people, not kill them (9:5); now they are allowed to kill a third of mankind (v. 15).

These parallels are a further indication that the sixth trumpet describes a further development in the demonic activities as the situation further escalates and becomes more horrific.

End-Time Demonic Activities

The source of the power of the horses is said to be in their mouths and their tails by which they inflict the inhabitants of the earth to the point of death (9:19). The tails correspond to the tails of the demonic forces in the fifth trumpet (see 9:10). It was noted above that in the Bible “tails” is a symbol of deception by which Satan turns people away from God. In Isa 9:14–15 “tails” symbolize false prophets deceiving people with their teaching. In Rev 12:4, the tail of the dragon (namely, Satan) pulled down from heaven a third of the stars. Satan is the “the serpent of old, who deceives the whole world” (12:9). The lamb-like beast arising from the earth is referred to as the false prophet speaking on behalf of Satan. Thus, the

serpent-like-tails weaponry of the demonic forces is the symbol of Satan's end-time deceptive activities by which he leads people astray from God (cf. 2 Thess 2:9–11).

While the demonic locusts inflict people with their serpent-like tails, they kill human beings with their mouths out of which emanate fire, smoke, and sulfur. They are equipped with weapons from the lake of fire (Rev 19:20; 20:10; 21:8). Fire, smoke, and sulfur in the OT are a means of executing divine judgments (Ps 11:6; Ezek 38:22). Fire and sulfur were used in destroying Sodom and Gomorrah as the smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace (Gen 19:24, 28; Luke 17:29). Elsewhere in the OT these elements are used for punishing the wicked (Ps 11:6; Isa 34:9–10; Ezek 38:22). In Revelation, the receivers of the mark of the beast will be "tormented with fire and sulfur before the holy angels and before the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever" (Rev 14:10–11). These three elements are used for the destruction of Satan and his forces in the lake of fire at the final judgment (Rev 20:10; cf. 19:20; 21:8).

In Revelation, the mouth is the symbol of spiritual weaponry in the end-time battle between the forces of good and evil (see 16:13–14; 19:15 and 21). This shows that the nature of the final crisis is not military, but rather spiritual and ideological. It is a battle for the minds and hearts of the people in the world (cf. 2 Cor 10:3–5).

The Historical Application of the Fifth and Sixth Trumpets

The fifth and sixth trumpets suggest that, as the end approaches, the situation in this world will be characterized by an intensification of demonic activity. The fifth trumpet describes the spiritual condition of the world in the aftermath of the Age of Enlightenment, which was characterized by the rise of rationalism, skepticism, humanism, relativism, and liberalism. It ultimately gave rise to secularism and its negative effects on Christianity. God-centered theology was replaced by atheistic, human-centered philosophy, which has little or no room for God (LaRondelle 1999:189; Doukhan 2002:88). The atheistic philosophy has alienated people from God and from each other, thus creating in them the agony of emptiness and meaninglessness. This stands in contrast to the green grass and trees that are nourished by water.

Although they have separated themselves from God, secular people still have a longing for spiritual values to fill the emptiness of their lives. However, resistance to the transforming power of the gospel provides an opportunity for Satan and demonic forces to fill that emptiness. The situation in Israel as described best by Amos who illustrates the spiritual condition in the world referred to in the fifth trumpet. When Israel "turned

justice into poison, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood" (Amos 6:12), God brought swarms of locusts upon their land (7:1–3). By rejecting the gospel, the people in the world are left defenseless against the demonic activity bringing destruction and death.

While in the fifth trumpet the demonic forces were very active, their power was still limited and restrained by God (9:4–5). However, the situation escalates with the sixth trumpet, as the evil forces are totally unleashed to do their menacing and harmful work under the governance of Satan. People who are without the seal of God are helpless against the demonic powers. It is during these intense demonic activities that God makes a special effort to reach human hearts in offering the everlasting gospel to the inhabitants of the earth (Rev 14:6–13). His mercies are still available and he hopes that sin-hardened hearts will respond and make a decisive turn-around.

Thus, the sixth trumpet brings us to the time of the end. It describes the events leading up to the battle of Armageddon described further in Rev 16:12–16. The parallels in language with Rev 7:1–4 and 16:12–16 situate the sixth trumpet at the very time of the end of the great gathering of Satan's army for the end-time battle of Armageddon.

Strong verbal and conceptual parallels between the sixth trumpet and Rev 7:1–4 and 16:12–16, link these two passages to each other:

- both the sixth trumpet and Rev 7:1–4 mention four angels that restrain the plagues about to come upon the inhabitants of the earth;
- both talk about binding and releasing the destructive forces;
- both use the phrase, "I heard the number of [them]" (7:4; 9:16);
- also, both in the sixth trumpet and Rev 16:12–16 are found the River Euphrates, demonic activities, military language, and mouths used as weaponry in the end-time conflict.

These parallels between the three passages situate the sixth trumpet at the very time of the end. In Rev 7:1–4, the four angels were holding back the winds of destruction. While in the fifth trumpet the demonic forces were very active, afflicting the inhabitants of the earth (9:4–6), their power was still limited and restrained by God. However, in the sixth trumpet, the supernatural forces are unleashed to operate under the governance of Satan, "the angel of the abyss" (9:11).

Through these destructive activities of the hellish demonic forces, God calls people to repentance (Osborne 2002:374). However, as the book shows, the people "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 either see or hear or walk" (9:20). The concept of "worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood" echoes Dan 5, when the Babylonians kept worshipping their

self-made gods prior to Babylon's fall (5:23–24). Even though rebellious humanity is tormented by demons, they do not want to turn to God. "And they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts" (9:21). In the Bible, these vices are the fruit of worshipping idols (Rom 1:18–32). All of these are the characteristics of those who do not follow the Lamb (Rev 21:8; 22:15).

This unrepentant world now becomes fertile ground for Satan's final great deception. The Book of Revelation shows that right before the Second Coming there will be a short-lived confederacy of the dragon, the sea beast, and the lamb-like beast in their opposition to God and his rightful rule in the world. "Each has its own history but, at the end-time, they join together in deception and coercion during the last battle" (Marshall 2000:147). In the end-time scenario, Satan will have a leading role. Rev 16:13–14 shows that the demonic activity will escalate to its highest point; it describes issuing out of "the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty" (for the equation of the sixth trumpet and Rev 16:12–16 see Beale 1999:513). The identification of the three demonic spirits in terms of frogs seems to be intentional. In the plague on Egypt, the frogs were the last plague that Pharaoh's magicians were able to duplicate to influence Pharaoh to persist in his opposition to God's request through Moses to let Israel go out of Egypt. In such a way, the three frog-like demonic spirits represent Satan's last counterfeit of God in an effort to ensnare and deceive the world to carry out his purposes (Beale 1999:513).

Satan's final deception will be very convincing. While the fifth and sixth trumpets describe the demonic activities embracing the whole world, Rev 16 points to the end-time scenario as something unparalleled in history. However the final deception will be implemented, it will be successful and convincing. Ellen G. White describes it as follows:

Fearful sights of a supernatural character will soon be revealed in the heavens, in token of the power of miracle-working demons. The spirits of devils will go forth to the kings of the earth and to the whole world, to fasten them in deception, and urge them on to unite with Satan in his last struggle against the government of heaven. By these agencies, rulers and subjects will be alike deceived. . . .

As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. The church has long professed to look to the Saviour's advent as the consummation of her hopes. Now the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. In different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness,

resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation (Rev. 1:13–15). The glory that surrounds him is unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld. The shout of triumph rings out upon the air: “Christ has come! Christ has come!” The people prostrate themselves in adoration before him. . . . This is the strong, almost overmastering delusion. (2005:624)

In conclusion, the book of Revelation shows clearly that as we near the end, demonic activity will increase in the world in different ways. The end-time warfare in which the whole world will be involved is not material, but spiritual (Ezell 1977:78). The end time scenario has cosmic significance. It will once and for all solve the question of who has the right to rule over the universe. However, in facing the evident reality of the extensive activities of the supernatural forces in the world today, it is important to remember that the description of the end-time demonic activity in Revelation begins with the well-established truth that Satan was cast out from heaven (Rev 9:1; 12:7–9).

In concluding the description of the destructive locusts swarming on the land, Joel makes a plea to the people: “Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart. . . . Now return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in loving kindness and relenting of evil” (2:12–13). The same applies to the people living at the time prior to the Second Coming.

It is important to remember that the supernatural forces of darkness do not harm those who are on God’s side (Rev 9:4). Their only security is found in Christ and the gospel. It was on the cross of Calvary that Jesus won the victory over Satan and his demonic forces. Any religion apart from Christ does not supply the needs of the world. In trying to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20), the church “must warn people of the cosmic powers in control of this secular world and call them to God” (Osborne 2002:388). What secular people need today is a clear understanding of the gospel, which alone can fill the emptiness in their lives and protect them from the torment caused by supernatural forces. As mentioned earlier, Jesus assured his followers: “I have given you authority to tread on *serpents and scorpions*, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you” (Luke 10:19). To the followers of Christ, Satan and his demonic agents are but defeated enemies.

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2015, vol. 11 no. 2

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