

forces. Borrowing from Paul Hiebert's 1982 article,<sup>14</sup> we might call this shift a movement from the flaw of the excluded middle to the flaw of the expanded middle (see Diagram 3). By this we simply mean that the "middle" area of spirits has become our preferred "zone" of explanation to the exclusion of ultimate religious truth (the upper zone) and physical or psychosocial empirical control (the lower zone).

Fourth and finally, we must address the question of our ability, being made in God's image and recreated as new creatures in Christ, to make appropriate choices in life and to live with the responsibilities of the poor choices we make. We must not lose the lesson of Job, focusing exclusively on victimization rather than honestly facing circumstances for what they are, seeking to fight creatively against the people, structures, and spirits that oppress, and praise God through (or in spite of) our circumstances because we have been given the freedom in Christ to make the choice of how we will respond. It is our hope that this article will enable us to see the issues related to evil spirits more clearly and to

deal with the resulting phenomena more effectively.

#### Endnotes

1. The same term is used of Christ indwelling in us (Eph. 3:17) and the Spirit dwelling in our hearts (Jas. 4:5).
2. Amplified: "[in the power] of an unclean spirit."
3. See also Mark 3:30; 7:25; 9:17; Luke 4:33; 7:33; 8:27; John 7:20; 8:48; 8:52; 10:20.
4. The same term is used of winds driving a ship (Jas. 3:4) and storms driving mists (2 Pet. 2:17).
5. See, for example, the discussion in C. Fred Dickason, *Demon Possession and the Christian* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), pp. 37-40 and Timothy Warner, *Spiritual Warfare* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), pp. 79-80.
6. Also Matt. 8:16, 31; 9:33-34; 10:1, 8; 12:24, 26-28; 17:19; Mark 1:39; 3:15, 22-23; 6:13; 7:26; 9:18, 28, 38; 16:9, [17]; Luke 9:49; 11:14-15, 18-20; and 13:32.
7. This probably indicates that self-reliance was creeping in, not just that they needed to call an extra prayer meeting before attempting the expulsion. It also indicates that prayer is to characterize the lives of those who would be involved in setting others free from spirit bondage.
8. For an extended discussion, see Clinton Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.
9. Probably because they refuse to submit and know that their rebellion will ultimately end in their doom.
10. The noun form is used of false teachers in 2 Thess. 2:11; 2 Pet. 2:18; 3:17; 1 John 4:6; 2 John 7; Jude 11 and 13. It is used of Satan himself in Rev. 12:9.
11. Perhaps the most influential writer along these lines in evangelical circles today is Neil Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 1990.
12. "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them." C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: MacMillan, 1961), p. 9.
13. See the discussion in Sheila Walker, *Ceremonial Spirit Possession in Africa and Afro-America: Forms, Meanings, and Functional Significance for Individuals and Social Groups*. Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1988.
14. "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle." *Missiology* 10 (Jan. 1982): 35-48.



# Territorial Spirits

## Some Biblical Perspectives

Vern S. Poythress

What are we to think about territorial spirits? The Argentinean pastor Omar Cabrera, after selecting a potential site for a new church, checks into a hotel and secludes

himself alone in a room in prayer and fasting. It usually takes the first two or three days to allow the Holy Spirit to cleanse him, to help him disassociate himself, and to identify with Jesus. He feels he "leaves the world" and is in another realm where the spiritual warfare takes place. The attacks of the enemy at times become fierce. He has even seen some spirits in physical form. His objective is to learn their names and break their power over the city. It usually takes five to eight days, but sometimes more. Once he spent 45 days in conflict. But when he finished, people in his meetings frequently are saved and healed even before he preaches or prays for them.<sup>1</sup>

Peter Wagner's books contain any number of other examples of dealing with "territorial spirits."<sup>2</sup> In one instance a missionary saw a dramatic contrast between two sides of the same street, one side in Brazil and the other side in Uruguay. The people standing on the Brazilian side were much more open and responsive to the gospel, apparently because the power of Uruguayan territorial spirits ended dramatically at the Uruguayan border.<sup>3</sup>

How are we to evaluate these accounts and the strategic advice that accompanies them? What does the Bible have to say about the idea of "territorial spirits"?

### Biblical Teaching on Spirits

The Bible has quite a bit to say about demons and about spiritual warfare. We see conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness when Jesus and his disciples cast out demons in the Gospels and the Book of

Acts. We see general statements about spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6:10-20, Romans 13:11-14, Revelation, and in scattered passages throughout the New Testament (e.g., Rom. 16:19-20; 1 Pet. 5:8-9; 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:22-26). Yet the dominant focus is on knowing God, not on knowing "Satan's so-called deep secrets" (Rev. 2:24; Rom. 16:19-20; Phil. 4:8-9). John Dawson, a prominent worker dealing with territorial spirits, expresses this truth well:

Let me add a strong warning [to my discussion of evil spirits]. The Bible is a carefully edited book that reflects the priorities of God for the believer and shows us the nature and character of Father God as revealed in Jesus. Although there are many Scripture passages that teach us about the devil and his devices, they are few in number compared with the space given to God's own character and ways. Even good angels are peripheral to the mature believer who is preoccupied with the majesty of the living God and Jesus, His Son. . . . Morbid fascination is a carnal appetite that can drive us to search out the hidden knowledge of the evil realm.<sup>4</sup>

We cannot at this point rehearse the totality of biblical teaching on evil spirits and spiritual warfare. It suffices to say that the warfare depicted in Ephesians 6:10-20 and Revelation is real and crucial as an aspect of Christian discipleship. Biblical instruction concerning the spirit world needs to be an integral part of our thinking and praying. Paul Hiebert complained years ago that the dominant mechanistic/scientific/technological world

view of the modern West influenced too many western missionaries.<sup>5</sup> By effectively excluding the activity of both angels and demons, the modern western world view made missionaries unprepared for the activity of evil spirits that they encountered in other countries.

Moreover, we must understand that the Book of Revelation is relevant to our own time and not exclusively to a final crisis or period of great tribulation immediately preceding the second coming. In my view, Revelation does indeed concern itself with a time of final crisis leading up to the second coming. But the features of spiritual warfare that belong intensively to the final crisis also characterize in a less intensive manner the entire course of our warfare. Paul indicates as much in 2 Thessalonians 2, where he speaks not only of a final antichrist figure, the man of lawlessness, but also of "the secret power of lawlessness . . . already at work" (2 Thess. 2:7). Similarly, 1 John 2:18 says that "many antichrists have come." When we apply this insight to Revelation, we conclude that Revelation reveals general principles of spiritual warfare, in addition to having some focus on the conflict in the Roman Empire in the first century and the final conflict leading to the second coming.<sup>6</sup>

### Daniel 10

Now what does the Bible have to say specifically about territorial spirits, that is, the association or confinement of evil spirits or angelic spirits to certain spatial locations or territories? The Bible contains very little explicit teaching that would satisfy our curiosity or

morbid fascination. But there are some scattered indications of various kinds. Some texts directly or indirectly indicate that we can expect, at least in many cases, that demons have a particular, spatially limited "habitat."

The most direct testimony comes from a passing mention in Daniel 10:13 and 10:20-11:1. The sequence of events begins with Daniel mourning for three weeks (10:2). At the end of the three weeks, a glorious angelic being appears to Daniel in 10:5-6. He tells Daniel that his prayer was heard from the first (10:12). But the angelic being was hindered from coming to Daniel:

But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. (Dan. 10:13)

The resistance lasted twenty-one days, corresponding exactly to the three weeks of Daniel's mourning. The angelic being was opposed by "the prince of the Persian kingdom." From the symmetry of the situation, we conclude that the opponent, like the one who spoke to Daniel, is a being of the spirit world; that is, the "prince" of Daniel 10:13 is an evil leader in the spiritual realm. This evil leader was "prince of the Persian kingdom," a particular geographical and political area.

Daniel 10:20-11:1 confirms these inferences. The angelic being gives a further account of a struggle in angelic warfare:

So he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come; but

first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. (No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince. And in the first year of Darius the Mede, I took my stand to support and protect him.)"

Here we find mention of "the prince of Persia," "the prince of Greece," and "Michael, your prince." Michael is clearly identified in Revelation 12:7 as a leader of an angelic host: "Michael and his angels." Revelation 12:7 must be understood as alluding to the Michael in Daniel. So we know that in Revelation 12 and Daniel 10, we are dealing with similar rather than unrelated phenomena. Michael, then, is not only an angelic being, but a leader over a



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sizable group of angels. He is an archangel, as Jude 9 denominates him.

In Daniel 10:21, Michael is also called "your prince." Because of the parallelism with "prince of Persia" and "prince of Greece," we naturally conclude that Michael is prince not merely with respect to Daniel as an individual, but with respect to an entire people—and the people in question is surely the people of Israel. By symmetry, the two other "princes," of Persia and Greece, have charge of Persia and Greece and are somehow involved in their political affairs—earlier the one prince is denominated "prince of the Persian kingdom" (10:13).

Michael is a good spirit, an unfallen angel, an archangel. The prince of Persia who resisted him must thus be an evil spirit, a fallen angel, an archdemon. In Daniel, Persia and Greece are both viewed in terms of their idolatrous character and their threat to persecute the saints (Dan. 7:2-6; 8:20-21). Hence it is probable that the prince of Greece is also an archdemon rather than an archangel. This inference is confirmed by 10:21, where Michael "supports me against them," them apparently referring to the prince of Persia and the prince of Greece.<sup>7</sup>

#### Other Passages on Spatial Localization of Demons

To this account in Daniel we may add many piecemeal observations from other parts of the Bible.

First, from systematic theology we observe that God alone is the omnipotent Creator (Rev. 4:11). There is only one God. All other spirit beings are creatures (Col.

1:16). Only God is omnipotent (Rev. 20:10). It is natural to infer that only God is omnipresent (Jer. 23:24). Hence angels and demons alike operate in some spatially limited way. The language in Daniel associating particular spirits with Persia, Greece, and Israel seems to confirm this inference.

Second, the Bible uses language of movement and spatial location in connection with spirits. Such language implies that spirits are spatially localized. The language occurs not only in Daniel 10:11-12, 20, but elsewhere, as in Job 1:6-7, 12; 2:1-2, 7; and Revelation 12:7-13; 20:1-3, 10. When Jesus confronts evil spirits, they "come out" of the

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demonized people. Jesus describes their movement pointedly in Luke 11:24-26:

When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, "I will return to the house I left." When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there.

One must allow, of course, that in Luke 11:24-26, the fully developed picture of a person leaving a house and then returning has metaphorical dimensions. Likewise, the visions in the Book of Revelation are not wholly literal repre-

sentations of demonic and angelic action. These passages provide metaphorical pictures for spiritual realities that we cannot fully understand. But we must still take seriously the language of spatial location and motion. It does not seem merely to provide color, but suggests that a literal element of spatial location attaches to spirits.

The involvement of space becomes still clearer in the case of the Gadarene demoniac (Matt. 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-17; Luke 8:26-37). The demons need some new location to which to go. They do not want to go to the Abyss (Luke 8:31). Jesus then permits them to go into the pigs. The response of the pigs makes the location of the demons physically evident to all. In sum, the demons are at first spatially located in the man; subsequently, they are spatially located in the pigs. At all times they are attached to a specific spatial location.

#### Idols

We must also consider biblical teaching about the connection between demons and idolatry. The Bible has a complex, nuanced view of idols. On the one hand, idols are less than nothing (Isa. 41:24-29). In contrast to the true God, they are utterly worthless and powerless to bring about predictions. On the other hand, those who worship idols give themselves over to the power of demons and demonic deceit. Paul sums up the situation in a single passage:

Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be



participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. (1 Cor. 10:19-21)

Paul asserts that there is only one God and one Lord (1 Cor. 8:4-6). "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (1 Cor. 10:26; Ps. 24:1). But within the sphere of God's comprehensive rule, God gives idolaters over to the deceits, torments, and confusions of demons, as a judgment on their unbelief.

The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. (2 Thess. 2:10-12)

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Cor. 4:4)

Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme. (1 Tim. 1:20)

Those who oppose him [the man of God] must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. (2 Tim. 2:25-26)

They [the supernatural locusts from the Abyss] were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a man. (Rev. 9:4-6)

Thus demons operate in conjunction with idols and idolatry. The association between idols and demons reinforces our expectation that, at least in many cases, demons may operate within a spatially restricted area. Any physical idol resides at a restricted location. The worshipers of the idol have a connection with that location. Because of their idolatry, the worshipers come under the power

of demons. The power of the demons thus also attaches loosely to the spatial area near the idol.

But in this kind of situation, idolatry rather than spatial location is the more fundamental fac-

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tor. Idolatry organizes itself to some extent along spatial lines, because idolatry does not operate individually. God ordains that human beings exist in corporate groupings, not merely as isolated individuals (Acts 17:26). The corporate existence of human beings gives them power to cooperate either in good or in evil (Gen. 11:1-9; 14:1-24). Idolatries typically spread and hold sway along the lines of social groupings. Hence, we infer, the demons associated with particular idolatries also hold sway along the lines of social groupings. Since these groupings often have geographical boundaries, the demonic sway will also have geographical boundaries.

The Bible contains various examples of idolatry with geographical boundaries. Particular peoples and territories often have "patron" gods. The Moabites devote themselves to the worship of Chemosh (1 Kings 11:7). The Ammonites worship Molech and Chemosh (1 Kings 11:7; Judg. 11:24). The Philistines of Ashdod worship Dagon (1 Sam. 5:2-7). The Sidonians worship Baal (1 Kings 16:31). A plurality of Baal gods seem to be associ-

ated with distinct sites: "Each locality had its own Baal or divine lord who frequently took his name from the city or place to which he belonged. Hence there were Baalmeon ('Baal of Meon,' Num. 32:38), Baal-hermon ('Baal of Hermon,' Judg. 3:3), Baal-hazor ('Baal of Hazor,' 2 Sam. 13:23), Baal-peor ('Baal of Peor,' Num. 25:3).<sup>8</sup>

One may find many other extrabiblical examples of localized gods from the nations around Israel. People commonly thought that gods attached themselves to particular regions. For example, the Arameans reasoned that Yahweh was "a god of the hills." The Israelites could be defeated by doing battle in the plains (1 Kings 20:23-25). The immigrants brought into Palestine after the exile of the northern kingdom made inquiry about the gods attached to their new land (2 Kings 17:26-28). But the people also continued to devote themselves to the gods of their own social group: "Each national group made its own gods in the several towns where they settled. . . ." (2 Kings 17:29). We thus see a combination of geographical and cultural factors. The people reckon geographically with "the god of the land" (v. 27) and culturally with the god of each cultural group, "each national group" (Hebrew, *goy goy*).

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**The Redemptive-Historical Transition Through Christ**

But some people might question whether we can apply this biblical material directly to our present situation. A large amount of the biblical material comes from the Old Testament and the Gospels. But our situation has fundamentally changed with the crucifixion,

resurrection, and ascension of Christ. In these events Christ decisively triumphed and defeated the whole realm of demonic spirits.

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Col. 2:15)

He [God the Father] raised him [Christ] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet. . . . (Eph. 1:20-22)

Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. (John 12:31)

Should we believe on the basis of these passages that demons have utterly disappeared? No. Passages like Ephesians 6:10-20 and 1 Peter 5:8-9, as well as exorcisms and demonic activity in the Book of

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Acts, indicate the contrary. Revelation 5:6-10 indicates that Christ has triumphed decisively. At the same time, demonic deceit and oppression take place through Satan, the beast, the false prophet, the prostitute, and their agents (16:13-14). The beast of Revelation 13:1-10 is a composite of the four beasts of Daniel 7. The demonic

depredations of the beast thus parallel the idolatrous and persecuting character of the Babylonian, Persian, and Grecian kingdoms, behind which stand evil spirits like the "prince of Persia" and "prince of Greece" (Dan. 10:20).

The picture of demons in the New Testament harmonizes with the overall character of New Testament teaching about "inaugurated eschatology," as described by Geerhardus Vos, Herman Ridder-

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bos, George E. Ladd, and many other New Testament scholars.<sup>9</sup> The new age, the eschatological realization, has dawned; it is inaugurated. Yet the consummation is still to come. Christ has won the decisive victory, but the full fruits of that victory are yet to come in the consummation. In the meantime, we live in the overlap of the old age of this world and the new age of Christ's resurrection.

We conclude, then, both that Christ has decisively triumphed over, curtailed, and inhibited demonic activity, and that, under the heels of this triumph, we can nevertheless expect to see demonic activity analogous to what we find in Daniel and the Gospels.

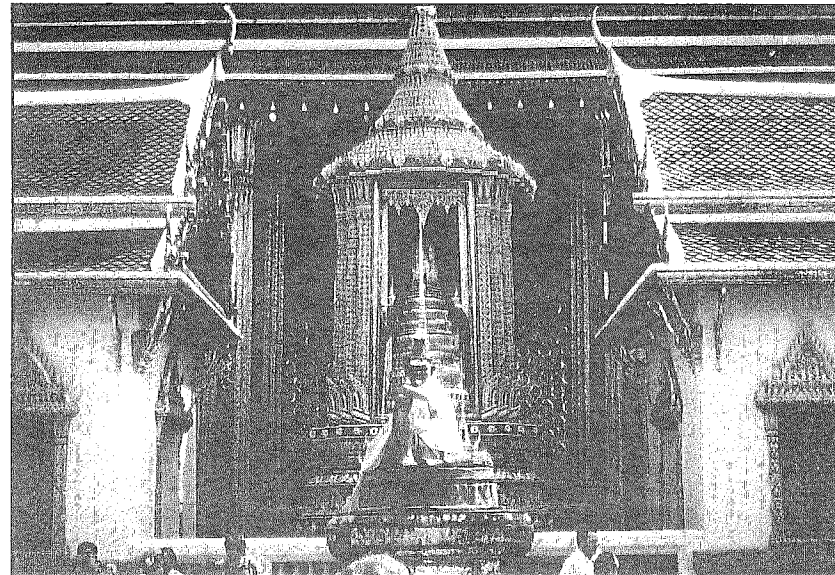
#### **Idolatry in the Book of Revelation**

The more specific pictures in the Book of Revelation confirm these general conclusions. In Revelation, Satan, the beast, the false prophet,

and the prostitute war against God and his people. All these evil characters in Revelation show evidence of demonic energy. Satan, of course, is the prince of demons. Satan energizes the beast as his image, a kind of counterfeit of the incarnation (13:1-4). In 13:11-18, the false prophet or beast from the earth works miraculous signs (v. 13) and demonic deceit (v. 14) in close association with the beast. The prostitute sits on the beast, indicating that she is supported by his power (17:3, 7-8). In preparation for the final battle, demonic spirits issue from the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (16:13-14), indirectly confirming that the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet are themselves demonic in character. They are, in fact, superdemonic characters from which other evil spirits can issue.

A careful study of imagery in the Book of Revelation also shows that the beast, the false prophet, and the prostitute have institutional and therefore localized spatial manifestations. Within the context of the Roman Empire and the seven churches of Asia to whom God addresses Revelation, the beast stands for the Roman Empire, its idolatrous claims, and its persecuting threats. The false prophet most probably stands for the imperial cult and its priests and supporters. The prostitute stands for the city of Rome and the temptations of its economic power.<sup>10</sup>

As we noted earlier, Revelation also invites application to later times. We find certain features of the beast in modern totalitarian governments and smothering, socialist bureaucracies. The false prophet appears as propaganda to



support the political and social status quo. The prostitute appears in the amoral pleasures offered by the modern city and the din of advertising enticing us to a life of hedonism and sexual abandon.

In fact, even within the Book of Revelation itself there are definite hints that the beast, the false prophet, and the prostitute may appear in a variety of subtler forms as well as in blatant forms. Jezebel in Revelation 2:20-22 is the primary starting point on which the later imagery of the prostitute in Revelation 17-18 builds. But the complacency with riches in Laodicea (3:17) also echoes the false riches of the prostitute in 17:4 and 18:11-20. In Thyatira, Jezebel tempts the people of God to eat idol food and practice sexual immorality. In Laodicea, temptation takes the form of self-satisfaction with external, illusory riches.

Or look at echoes of the beast in

Revelation 2-3. In Revelation 2:10, Satan threatens to put Christians in prison and kill them. Since the power of imprisonment and death belongs to the state, this threat arises in close association with demonized state power, that is, the beast. Revelation 3:8 speaks of having little strength, yet not denying the name of Christ. The possibility of denying the name of Christ again hints at a threat of persecution, and so brings us into the sphere of action of the beast. Christ promises to keep them from the hour of trial, which in principle encompasses trials from both the beast and the prostitute. Revelation 2:26-27 hints of temptation to feel weak and hopeless, which seems to be the underside of the worldly response to the terrible power of the beast.

The temptations may have various complexions in different churches and in different cities of



Asia. To some extent, the prostitute embodies herself not only in Rome but in each of the seven cities of Asia. But in each city, the temptations to pleasure and worldliness may take a different form. Likewise, the beast embodies himself not only in the Roman Emperor but in the political and social power structures of each of the seven cities.

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The imagery in Revelation for the beast, the false prophet, and the prostitute speaks concretely to the churches in Asia. But it expresses also more general principles and thus is flexible enough to find multiple applications. In fact, the imagery teaches among other things that Satan is a counterfeiter. Satan, the beast, and the false prophet counterfeit the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, respectively.<sup>11</sup> The prostitute counterfeits the bride of 19:7-9. As a counterfeiter, Satan has fundamentally no other alternative than to imitate the true. Thus his actions and the actions of his demons always and inevitably take the form that we find depicted in Revelation.

We conclude then, that in every city and every social group there will be forms of idolatry. These forms of idolatry will always correspond to and embody principles operative in the imagery of Reve-

lation. In idolatry we have a manifestation of Satan, of the beast, of the false prophet, and of the prostitute. Idolatry and the demonic are always in one respect fundamentally the same. They counterfeit the truth, power, and beauty of God and his kingdom. At the same time, they take variant forms in every city and every social group. Since demons are behind idols, the variant forms of idolatry manifest variations in demonic activity.

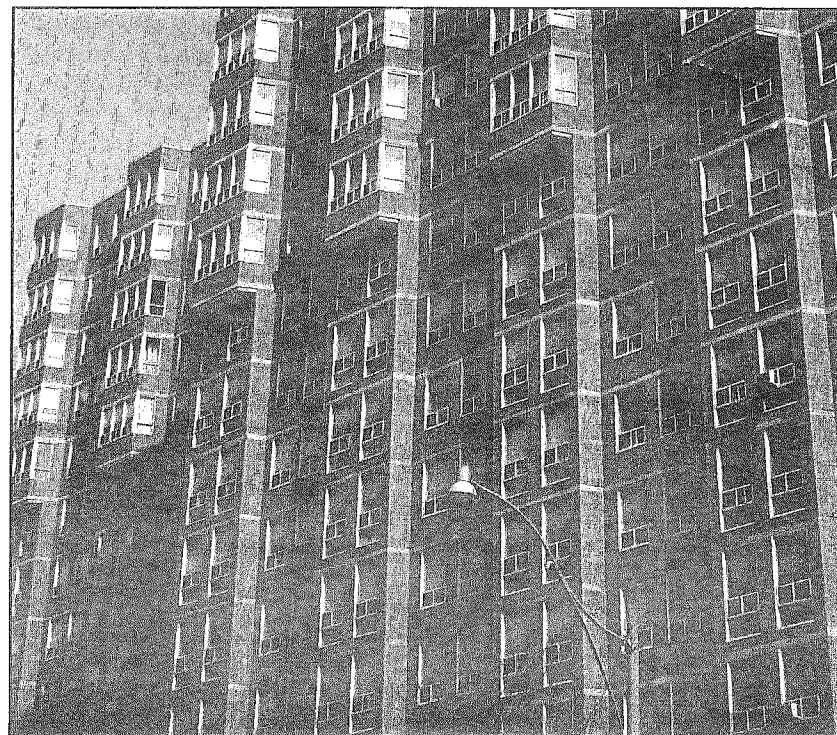
It should also be noted that demonic activity does not follow exclusively geographical lines, but institutional and social lines as well. The demonized activity of the beast runs in coherent form throughout the Roman Empire in the form of idolized imperial power. The demonized activity of the prostitute runs in coherent form through the pagan world in the form of prostitution that is socially accepted, and in the form of economic prosperity enjoyed through participation in city life, at the heart of which is pagan, idolatrous culture.

In the religious climate of the Roman Empire, people inevitably encountered a plurality of options and directions for idolatry. For example, some Jews attacked the Christian faith and moved into an anti-Christian Judaism. Revelation describes "those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" (2:9, 3:9). The label "synagogue of Satan" shows that despite the claim to be worshiping the true God, the members of this "synagogue" were at root idolaters. A very different form of idolatry occurs in the teaching of Balaam and Jezebel, who endorsed eating food sacrificed to idols (2:14, 20). Still a third form occurs in wor-

shipping the emperor (13:1-8). We can expect to find at least these three kinds of idolatry here and there throughout the Roman Empire. If we add in our extrabiblical knowledge of mystery religions, Hellenistic philosophies, and various local deities, we get quite a collection of types of idolatry. None of these monopolized the allegiance of the cities of Asia.

Hence, in the Roman Empire, the specific character of idolatry depends less on geographical location than on people's attachment to one or another religious group devoted to a particular idol or religious cause. People's social and religious solidarity with a particular community of worshipers counts for much more than one's geo-

graphical location. The same is surely true to an even greater degree in the pluralistic societies of the modern West. Peculiarly modern idolatries do not attach to locations so much as to particular ideological commitments. Recognizing this truth, analysts like Jacques Ellul and Herbert Schlossberg make good steps in discerning idolatries in the form of worship of sexual pleasure, revolution, technique, history, humanity, mammon, nature, and power.<sup>12</sup> Such analyses apply to the modern scene the themes of idolatry and demonization in Revelation. In following idolatry along the lines of ideology and socialization rather than strictly geographical lines, they are much closer to a biblically grounded



approach than is speculation about which demons might be assigned to a particular spatial location.

### Theistic Focus

The ultimate foundation for this world and its history lies not in the works of evil but the works of God. God is the king (Rev. 4:3-11). He does not cease to reign with all control and effectiveness simply because persons or angels rebel. Revelation celebrates the wonder and glory of God, not the horror of

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### *The Bible contains various examples of idolatry with geographical boundaries.*

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Satan. We likewise should learn to focus on God and his ways, not lusting after knowing "Satan's so-called deep secrets" (2:24).<sup>13</sup>

In fact, God-centered worship, service, and spiritual warfare provide the only proper framework for dealing with evil spirits. Within this framework, as provided by Revelation, we have access to God on his throne and join in praise with the throngs of heaven (Rev. 4-5). We celebrate the inviolable victory of Christ and the sureness of his coming. We thereby gain confidence and faith to pray for the overthrow of evil opposition (8:3-5, 15:2-4).

Within this context, Revelation does call us to recognize how subtle as well as how fearsome and widespread is demonic activity. We recognize also that such activity takes specific territorial form, following the lines of social, urban,

and geographically specific idolatries. Revelation encourages us to pray against the works of evil in whatever specific forms we find them. Especially the messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 encourage us to recognize the specific temptations, dangers, oppressions, idolatries, and underlying demonic forces that confront us in any one specific locale. But in doing so, we must often acknowledge the way in which modern western demonization follows ideological and not strictly geographical lines. We need insight from God, insight from the One like a son of man, with eyes like blazing fire (1:13-14). But even that insight focuses first on the throne of God and thereby sees the futility, the worthlessness, and the utter defeat of the works of Satan.

The way, then, to confront the territorial spirits of this world is not the way of esoteric knowledge, but the way of the cross, of knowing God in Christ.

### Modern Experiences with Territorial Spirits

In these days, anecdotal accounts and advice come to us from many sources on the topic of territorial spirits. It is difficult to evaluate anecdotes if only because they raise so many questions and our knowledge is so partial. I have chosen in this article to look to Scripture rather than the anecdotes. We must nevertheless apply Scripture to the immense variety of situations that we confront, using all the variety of gifts that the Spirit gives to the body of Christ. If nothing else, the anecdotes challenge us to engage in this process of application for ourselves.

For the sake of application, then, we need to wrestle with what the anecdotes report. I am not equipped to do this well. I venture only a first tentative impression. In the anecdotes, we see people confronting the same realities of which the Book of Revelation speaks. But the people in the anecdotes seldom use the Book of Revelation explicitly. Dispensationalism has sometimes had the effect of pushing the Book of Revelation so exclusively into the future that people no longer see how it empowers understanding and acting in the present. Whether for this reason or other reasons, the Book of Revelation has not played nearly as strong a role as it could in the church's present-day spiritual warfare. By using the Book, we might bring to the struggle the biblical solidity needed to stabilize and strengthen spiritual warfare, thus counterbalancing the exuberantly experimental character of the experiences, and guarding against dangers seen and unseen.

### Endnotes

1. C. Peter Wagner, "Territorial Spirits," in C. Peter Wagner, ed., *Engaging the Enemy: How to Fight and Defeat Territorial Spirits* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1991), p. 45.

2. See *ibid.* and Peter Wagner, ed., *Breaking Strongholds in Your City*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993.

3. Timothy Warner, "Dealing with Territorial Demons," Wagner, ed., *Engaging the Enemy*, p. 53.

4. John Dawson, "Foreword," Wagner, *Engaging the Enemy*, pp. xii-xiii.

5. Paul G. Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," *Missiology* 10 (Jan. 1982): 35-47.

6. For exposition of similar views on the Book of Revelation, see Leon Morris, *Revelation* (London: Tyndale, 1969), pp. 15-22; Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

7. Calvin and some other commentators interpret the language of "princes" to refer to earthly kings (John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, Vol. 2 [reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.], p. 252). But supernatural powers stand behind the earthly authorities, as hinted in Isaiah 24:21 and openly indicated in Revelation. Thus many other commentators understand "prince" as a reference to angels and demons. See Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), pp. 226-27; C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), pp. 416-18; Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1978), p. 181; John E. Goldingay, *Daniel* (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), pp. 291-92; Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), pp. 283-84.

8. K. G. Jung, "Baal," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, rev. ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 377.

9. Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961; Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969; Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975; George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974.

10. See, e.g., G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*. London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974.

11. See, e.g., Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, p. 207.

12. Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons*. New York: Seabury, 1975; Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and its Confrontation with American Society*. Nashville: Nelson, 1983.

13. So likewise Dawson, "Foreword," pp. xii-xiii.