

## Don'T Let Your House Stand Empty

Guarding Against an Infestation of Demons

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About two months ago, I noticed a wasp nest in the archway of a garage door on my property. I thought to get a broom and knock it down, but was running late for a meeting, and so I deferred. Later that afternoon, I was talking with my neighbor on another matter, and happened to mention the nest. He thought maybe we should investigate.

At about that time, his 40 year-old son happened to drive up. That was a surprise; he usually is at work at this time. He insisted in joining our investigation, and took along some poison in a can that is capable of spraying some 20 feet. As we approached the nest, he asserted that it was not a wasp's nest at all, but a hornet's nest.

He quite vociferously indicated that hornets were a lot worse because people could not out-run them. They apparently attack one's face, at least in his experience. He indicated that, had I attempted to knock the nest down with a broom, I might have ended up in the hospital, since this was a highly active nest, about 9 by 9 inches, and growing.

He asked that his father and I, along with his two teenage sons, stand far back. In less than ½ an hour, the animals were dead, the nest down and in the burn pile.

I reflected later that night about the provision and protection of God. I had not planned to mention the nest to my neighbor, and I certainly did not expect his son to appear moments after I had done so. God saved me a lot of trouble and pain. Moreover, the incident taught his two sons about the critters as well. God killed a number of hornets with one stone, so to speak. As well, the incident spawned this split-sermon.

Actually the word hornet appears a number of times in God's Word. For example, in Exodus 23 God connects hornets with the concepts of terror and panic.

**Exodus 23:28** I will cause the people ahead of you to feel terror and throw into confusion all the nations you come to. I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you in retreat. I will send the hornet in front of you, and it will drive the Hivites, Canaanites, and Hittites away from you.

Today, let us talk about infestation. We will see that God is sending "the hornet" among transgressing Israel, in the form of any number of plagues that damage our

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agriculture—our gardens, our trees—yes, also our bodies. But, is there even a more dangerous kind of infestation?

The word infestation comes to us most directly through the field of botany. Infestation refers to the state of being invaded or overrun by parasites, which are usually insects or microorganisms. It can refer to parasite's living in or on the host. However, we can correctly speak of infestations of large animals or even of plants. So, the term "shark-infested waters" has become almost a cliché.

There are three concepts behind the notion of infestation, all of which are menacing, and sinister.

Infestation involves a concentration of danger, which of course makes it all the more dangerous. We are not dealing with one bug, but with many. There is danger in numbers.

The infestation can spread, grow, and overcome its host, causing more damage or pain. This is a serious threat with organic infestations.

Finally, the invasion can be relatively slow, sub-rosa, and surreptitious. In this sense, it is different from the perils of lightning, earthquake or tsunami, all of which are characterized by speed and, hence, by surprise. They are highly visible. But, an infestation often involves organisms in the soil or in the wood of a tree or of a home, where they cannot readily be seen. The behind-the-scenes nature of many infestations renders their danger insidious. Though the bugs may be invisible, they are neither innocuous nor inactive. The danger, though subtle, remains.

So, the word infestation has a highly negative, pejorative connotation, associated as it is with creeping inconvenience, pain, and even death. For this reason, botanists often call infestations pernicious, that is, harmful or destructive to health and life.

Yes, infestations can cause vast damage to people, plants, animals, and property in general. Let us take a look at some examples.

Children's hair can become infested with lice. This is less pernicious than it is inconveniencing to the child—and his mother.

The spread of the Africanized Honey Bee (most of us call them "killer bees") into most of the southern sections of the United States is another example of infestation. This is a more threatening invasion than lice. It has a large scale with vast economic

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ramifications.

In Missouri there are all sorts of wood-boring beetles that can damage the wood in our homes. And, there is the Blister Beetle, which can infest alfalfa (at the time of the 2nd or 3rd cuttings) and can sicken or destroy the grazing animals that consume it, especially horses.

For decades now, fourteen states in the US and two Canadian provinces have been undergoing a plague of Emerald Ash Borer, a beetle highly destructive to ash trees. These critters have destroyed actually hundreds of thousands of these trees.

And, the Japanese have invaded southern Missouri. That is, the Japanese beetle, which devours row crops, shrubs, fruit trees and garden vegetables.

These are just a few of the invasions going on under our feet—or under our noses. Like any Missourian, I call these "show me" infiltrations, as they are invasions we do not see all that easily.

Of course, there are other types of infestations. For example, of all the home infestations, one of the most pernicious has been the infestation of liberals that has recently overtaken the White House, an infestation that has spread to the Congress, the Supreme Court and some State Houses. But as yet, God has not put an end to that infestation—that pernicious plague.

More seriously, although we do not think of it this way, an infectious disease is in fact a type of infestation of microorganisms into a larger organism. It can be deadly if the immune system of the host is not able to combat it efficiently.

And finally, before I end this section, I want to refer you to Ronnie Graham's excellent sermonette "Beasts Among Us." In it, he speaks about the population explosion of large animals, like alligators, that threaten our lives. You will find it on [www.cgg.org](http://www.cgg.org) under number T988s, delivered April 17, 2010. This sort of infestation certainly deserves your attention as well.

In God's Word, we see many infestations. I mention only the most obvious here. Consider the plagues of frogs, gnats, and flies of Exodus 8. In Exodus 8:3 Moses told Pharaoh that frogs will enter, "your palace, into your bedroom and on your bed, into the houses of your officials and your people, and into your ovens and kneading bowls." In other words, the critters were going to be about everywhere!

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Certainly, the plague of locusts recorded in Exodus 10 is a classic example of an infestation. Moses tells Pharaoh in Exodus 10:5 that the locust

**Exodus 10:5-6** . . . shall cover the face of the earth, so that no one will be able to see the earth; and they shall eat the residue of what is left, which remains to you from the hail, and they shall eat every tree which grows up for you out of the field. They shall fill your houses, the houses of all your servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians. . . .

Please, turn to Mark 5 as we focus our attention to another type of infestation—the most dangerous of all—demon infestations.

**Mark 5:1-9** Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes. And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains, because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him. And he cried out with a loud voice and said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me." For He said to him, "Come out of the man, unclean spirit!" Then He asked him, "What is your name?" And he answered, saying, "My name is Legion; for we are many."

Admittedly, demons do not always attack in large numbers. But, very frequently, more than one is involved. Luke 8:2 tells us that Mary Magdalene once had seven demons. Psychiatrists, in interviewing some criminals, report that they interviewed not just one individual, but more than one person within one person. We know, of course, that they are really interviewing demons.

The individual discussed here in Mark 5 was obviously under the control of a number of demons. How many? Well, we do not know for sure, but enough that he was nicknamed Legion, which was a Roman military term for a division of about 6,000 soldiers. This is quite an infestation.

Let us address the breadth and depth of the demon problem by looking at Luke 11. Just

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how common are these demonic infestations, of any size? Now, before I go further, I need to be clear: I am not arguing that we should blame a demon every time we stub our toe or that we should look for a demon under every rock. That way of thinking becomes a rationalization for sin, a cop-out, a defense mechanism. "The Devil made me do it!" "A demon made me do it!" That excuse, of course, is not acceptable to God. Yes, we can get into trouble enough without the influence—the "assistance"—of demons. Still, perhaps more often than we think, there are demons involved. In this passage, Christ casts out a demon, and uses the occasion to teach us quite a bit about them.

**Luke 11:14-16** And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marveled. But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons." Others, testing Him, sought from Him a sign from heaven.

With that context in mind, skip to verse 21. Here, Christ, answering His critics, makes some interesting points.

**Luke 11:21-23** "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils. He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters."

The imagery Christ uses here is that of an estate which houses objects of value. We will call those valuable objects assets. The owner hires "a strong man," maybe armed to the hilt, to protect those assets. All is fine until someone comes along who is stronger than that guard. The guard is subdued and his conqueror plunders the estate and divides the spoil.

Who is this strong guard? Well, we will see that there may be two answers.

Certainly, one approach is to consider Christ to be this strong man. After all, who is stronger than Christ? But, if Christ is dwelling in us—our minds, our "house"—who will overcome Him? Christ may be saying that He is the one we should bring into our home, our mind.

I will not ask you to turn to John 17, which is germane to this point. Christ, praying to His

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Father, makes it plain that He guarded His disciples.

**John 17:12** "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled."

Then, there is I John 5:18.

**I John 5:18** We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God [Christ, of course] keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.

Now, returning to Luke 11, let us consider these assets that I mentioned. What are they?

The assets surely include our talents and abilities that we have been given by God. These are valuable. I think we can say that the assets also include our good attitudes, and our reputation—hopefully it is also a good one. The assets most definitely include the relationships that we have built over time with others. Trust is a real asset. If we have relationships with others based on trust, where they know they can count on us, and we know we can count on them, that is a precious asset indeed. Just ask any salesman, or any businessman, many who build their livelihood on trust and on reputation.

But, Christ is saying that if we do not guard these assets, whatever they may be, a demon can take them over, exploit them, use them for his own purposes, and "divide up the plunder" so to speak.

Notice, Christ does not say the conquering demon destroys the assets, like God commanded Saul to destroy the assets of the Amalekites under Agag. Rather, the demon (or demons) subtly take control of our mind, or at least influence it, with the intention of using our abilities, talents, attitudes, yes, even our established relationships with others—all those assets—for evil purposes. Such demonic infestation is highly subtle.

Over time, perhaps quite a bit of time, they corrupt the attitudes and relationships a person has, and uses a person's talents for ill. What a weapon for evil the demon has found!

Let us say that a brother has a fine reputation, a well-deserved one, as a teacher who understands God's Word correctly, who divides it correctly. But, behind the scenes, unseen, and over a period of time, this person let us down his guard and allows himself to become subverted by a demon. When that happens, that demon begins to speak through the brother, misapplying God's Word, and doing at the same time a whole lot of damage to God's people. That is why we need to test, never accepting on face value. We need to be on guard.

Please turn to II Thessalonians 3. Remember, I mentioned that there may be a second answer to the question, "Who is the strong man Christ mentions in Luke 11:21?" So notice what Paul says.

**II Thessalonians 3:3** But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.

So, again, Christ is the guard. But notice, there is more to it this time. Paul continues:

**II Thessalonians 3:4-5** And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you. Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

We must do something. We must guard. We must keep our minds.

Please, turn to Ephesians 6. Paul probably had Christ's strong-man analogy in mind when he wrote this.

**Ephesians 6:10-18** Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. [It is Christ who strengthens us. So note our assignment:] Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. [Unfriendly hornets indeed!] Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet

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of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Now, my purpose is not to review all these items of armor. But I do want to make a point. Remember in Luke 11:22, Christ mentioned how the malfeasant stronger man overcame the guard and took, "from him all his weapons he trusted in." In other words, the malfeasant uses the very armor of the strong man for his own purposes.

As an example, he takes the strong man's "sword of the Spirit, which is God's word." You see, the demon actually takes God's Word and exploits it for his own purposes, using the man as his mouthpiece. And, the demon can do this to a person who, only a short time before perhaps, had a right understanding of God's Word, but who became complacent and allowed himself to be subverted. He did not guard his house adequately.

John Reid tells of an interesting example of this. Defending the Sabbath on one occasion to someone who had asked a question on the website, he quoted Mark 2:28: "Therefore the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." The man shot right back at him: "If Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath, then He can change the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday."

Now, I am convinced that this man's retort did not reflect the idea of a man. It is the teaching of a demon, misusing God's Word. In all likelihood, this man had been hoodwinked by a demon. We will not turn to I Timothy 4:1. But there, Paul describes the kind of situation probably at work here. The individual had paid "attention to deluding and seducing spirits and doctrines that demons teach." Yes, a demon had overcome this man, taken his sword and was using—or we perhaps should say, misusing, abusing—God's Word to teach a lie, to promulgate a lie about the Sabbath.

We have all seen this done endless times. How many people—in and out of God's Church—quote Scripture to justify going to war, stealing, racism, and other such? They do not properly divide God's Truth. They misapply it. And, they are merely mouthing the words of demons who have stolen the sword of God's Word and are using it for their own diabolical purposes.

But, how often does this happen? Is Christ addressing a relatively small audience, only those possessed of demons, as this man from the tombs obviously was? This was an extreme, unusual case. Or, is Christ addressing maybe a little bit larger audience, those influenced on occasions by demons? Notice His very next remark. Luke 11:23:

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**Luke 11:23** "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters.

This statement comes almost out of nowhere and, at first blush, appears irrelevant to Christ's topic here. But, it is not. You see, all of a sudden Christ makes a global, a general statement that pertains to us all. He applies His comments very broadly. Anyone. You are with Christ—Christ is in your home—or you scatter. Christ's words about the strong man being overcome apply to us all. The threat of demon infestation is real for everyone!

So, demons can attack anyone. Mr. Ritenbaugh, writing about Ephesians 2:2, mentions that we live in a sea of air. There, too, is the prince of the power of the air, and all his cronies. Air surrounds us, and so do the demons, in abundance. Talk about shark-infested waters! We swim in them, surrounded by myriads of demons, all of them unfriendly to God, and to us. They view us as interlopers, beings who are occupying their space. They consider this planet to be theirs.

Let us continue in Luke 11. Christ continues to instruct us about demons:

**Luke 11:24-25** "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' [Oh how possessive they are!] "And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order.

Notice what the demon did not find. There was no guard there! Continuing:

**Luke 11:26** "Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first."

I remember Mr. Armstrong talking about breaking habits. He used the example of a small child playing with scissors. Parents take them away as soon as they can, and the child, missing his toy, starts to cry. Mr. Armstrong said that wise parents replace the dangerous object with an innocuous one, a toy that will safely entertain the child.

Likewise, when God cleanses people of demons—that is, when He cleans house, when He removes those dangerous scissors, those so healed need to replace the demons

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with something else. Do not let your house stand empty. If you do, be assured that it will not stand empty for long. You have heard the adage that nature abhors a vacuum. It or they will seek to fill it up.

To avoid even more unwanted house guests—a bigger infestation—employ Christ as your security guard. And, stand guard yourself with Him in the gap. Demons are actively on the prowl, looking for a home—a mind—in which to dwell. Where they find no guard—or a distracted and weakened one, they will attack.

We do not see them—these hornets with their fiery darts. They are like those termites in the wood of your home, or the beetles in a tree. Unseen, but they may be there, insidiously doing their ruinous work. Eventually, however, we will see the results of their clandestine activity. We will see the results of a mind conquered by demons.

The works of the flesh are the natural and inevitable consequences of a mind ruled or at least influenced by demons.

**Galatians 5:19-21** Now the works of the flesh are evident [at this point, they are not longer hidden, but obvious for all to see], which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

As we conclude turn to II Peter 2. Early in this chapter, it seems that Peter is talking about people, but by verse 17, it becomes pretty clear that he is taking here about demons, and their damaging work among mankind.

**II Peter 2:17-20** These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning.

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Remember Christ's comments in Luke 11:26: "That man's last condition is worse than the first."

It is the same idea here. I am sure Peter remembered Christ's words about one strong man being overcome by another as he wrote these words. Peter continues:

**II Peter 2:21** For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.

Brethren, let us all pray, as Paul did in II Thessalonians 3:5—we were there a few minutes ago—that God will direct our "hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ." Centered there, we will not succumb to the insidious infestations of demons.