

The Fifth and Sixth Trumpet Judgments (Revelation 9:1-21)

Because the Lamb, Jesus Christ, is Lord of all, He has the rightful and necessary claim to rule over this world. However, sinful humanity vies for control. Only through three future series of judgments will Jesus wrestle control away from rebellious humanity. The first series, the Seal Judgments, includes the release of human-caused devastation—political domination and warfare that will result in famine, death, and martyrdom. The second series, the Trumpet Judgments, begin with natural disasters—hail, asteroid and meteorite strikes, and the darkening of the heavenly bodies. These judgments increase in intensity as Jesus graciously yet firmly warns the world to repent. The final three Trumpet Judgments, identified as three “woes,” will follow this intensifying pattern. Specifically, the fifth and sixth Trumpet Judgments unleash unparalleled demonic activity on the earth. These two future judgments highlight the fact that we live in the midst of spiritual realities and must depend on Jesus for spiritual victory. To ignore the spiritual realm is to court personal and even eternal disaster.

The fifth Trumpet Judgment—a demonic invasion will inflict extensive torment on earth’s inhabitants (9:1-12).

The fifth Trumpet Judgment is the first of three “woes,” dire developments that will bring untold misery on the earth in the effort to bring people to their knees before the Lamb, Jesus Christ.

The fifth angel sounded his trumpet and a star fell from heaven to earth and received the key to the abyss (9:1).

In his vision of the future John saw seven angels with seven trumpets. These angels announced the release of seven judgments on the earth. When the fifth angel sounded his trumpet John saw a star that had fallen out of heaven onto the earth. The timing of this fall is not indicated, but at this point in the Great Tribulation Period (Revelation 7:14) this star will receive special authority to release a hoard of demons. The fact that this star carries out volitional functions indicates that it’s an intelligent being rather than a celestial body. The Bible sometimes refers to angels as stars (Job 38:7). One specific angel may be in mind in Isaiah 14:12 and carries the name “Morning Star” or “Lucifer.” The fact that the star in the fifth Trumpet Judgment had fallen from heaven likely points to this particular angel, known most commonly as Satan (compare Luke 10:18; Revelation 12:7-9). Satan receives, presumably from the Lord, the key to the shaft of the abyss. The abyss (literally “without depth” or “bottomless”) is a name that designates the place of confinement of demons (Luke 8:31). Satan will be given the authority to release these confined demons and send them to wreak havoc on the world.

A locust-like hoard of demons emerged from the abyss and was given power to torment people for five months (9:2-6).

When the fallen star, Satan, opened the shaft of the abyss smoke ascended like that of a great furnace. Fire and smoke are common descriptions of the place of judgment for unholy

creatures (Matthew 3:12; 5:22; 18:8-9; 25:41). The smoke will be so thick that it will darken the sun and the atmosphere. Emerging from the smoke will be a swarm of locusts. It's best to take literally that which is described in Revelation unless there are clues in the text to do otherwise. Here we have a case of a text-based reason for seeing symbolism in these words. Rather than literal locusts this swarm had such unusual characteristics that it must refer to something different. Locust swarms in ancient times were sometimes symbolic of human armies due to their comprehensive, destructive actions (compare Joel 1-2). The locusts that will come from the abyss, therefore, consist of an army of demons released on the earth. They will have the ability to inflict pain like the sting of scorpions, another dreaded, dangerous insect. Unlike real locusts this swarm of demons will not hurt trees or vegetation. Their target will be the people living on the earth. However, those who have the seal of God on their foreheads will be immune from their attacks (compare Revelation 7:3).

The swarm of demons will be limited in its scope—it will not be able to kill and it will have only five months to perform its nefarious task. Five months is the usual length of time that a locust invasion takes to devastate a region, and these demon locusts will be limited to a similar timeframe. During that time these demons will torment people. This torment will include physical pain like that of the sting of a scorpion. However, the torment inflicted by the demon locusts will likely extend to emotional pain as well. Demons caused all kinds of physical and mental pain in their victims during Jesus' earthly ministry (Matthew 12:22; 17:14-18; Mark 5:1-5) and their methods will be matched and even surpassed during that future day of disaster. Certainly they know that their time is short and their fate is sealed. So severe will be their torment that people will seek death but be unable to find it. People will "long to die." Death, however, will flee from them in spite of suicidal longings.

The hoard of demons had a fearsome appearance and a dreadful ruler named Destroyer (9:7-12).

John went on to describe the appearance of these demon locusts in order to emphasize the terror they'll inflict on the earth. He uses terms for similarity ("like" and "as") several times, underscoring the symbolism of this passage. These demon locusts will look like horses prepared for battle. They will have crowns of victory on their heads and their faces will have the appearance of human faces (probably indicating intelligence). They will have the hair of women and teeth like lions, possibly referring to their seductive yet deadly ways. These demon locusts will have breastplates like iron and the sound they make will resemble the sound of many horses and chariots racing to war, both symbolizing their indestructible power. Their tails will be like those of scorpions with the ability to inflict painful stings. But again, their power over people will be limited to a period of five months. Still, this should be enough to bring the people on earth to understand that the Lamb is Lord.

Although real locusts have no king (Proverbs 30:27) these demon locusts will have a king over them. Their king will be "the angel of the abyss," probably referring to the "star" that received the key to the abyss—Satan. This ruler of the demons has the name "Destroyer," a name that John records in both Hebrew ("Abaddon") and Greek ("Apollyon"). The king of the demon locusts will leave destruction in his wake to the extent allowed by the Lamb. This plague of demon locusts is the first of three "woes," the fifth of the Trumpet Judgments. Two more woes were yet to come.

**The sixth Trumpet Judgment—a demonic army
will annihilate one-third of the earth's population (9:13-21).**

The future judgments on earth will grow in intensity. It would seem that a hoard of demons inflicting torment on people for five months would be sufficient to alert human hearts to the realities of the spirit world and their need for Jesus Christ. The sixth Trumpet Judgment, however, will bring even greater disaster on earth and still, people will refuse to repent.

The sixth angel sounded his trumpet and four bound demons were released to kill one-third of the earth's population (9:13-15).

When the sixth angel sounded his trumpet John heard a voice coming from the four horns of the golden altar of incense that is located in the presence of God on His throne. Previously an angel was associated with this altar in connection with the prayers of the saints (Revelation 8:3), so it may be that this same angel was the source of this voice. However, the voice may have simply emanated from some unidentified source, thereby adding to the mystery of these revelations. The voice instructed the sixth trumpet-bearing angel to “release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” Since these angels had been bound they are evil angels—demons. The Euphrates River was a significant eastern boundary in ancient times and fed the region of Babylon, the source of much idolatry. The idea that four demons were bound at this river may imply a divine restraint to the power of evil that emanated from the east. When these four demons are released this restraint will be gone. These demons will unleash even greater destruction on the earth. Through divine providence the four demons had been prepared for that very hour of that day of that month of that year. Their time will at last arrive. They will be released to kill one-third of the earth's population. One-fourth of the population will die during the fourth Seal Judgment (Revelation 6:8), and one-third of the remaining population will die during the sixth Trumpet Judgment, amounting to a total population decline of one-half—literally, billions of people!

The four demons mobilized an army of two hundred million to carry out their deadly mission (9:16-19).

How will these four demons execute their purpose? Abruptly, John introduces a vast army. These horsemen will number two hundred million. It's possible that this army will be a human army. If so, the descriptions in the following verses may refer to the destructive effects of human military weapons. However, these descriptions again seem to reveal a symbolism that moves beyond human activities. Therefore, this vast army is likely composed of demons who are distinct from those released under the fifth Trumpet Judgment. The demon locusts were allowed only to torment their victims. This next army of demons will be released to kill their victims. This demon army and its horses will have breastplates that are multi-colored—fiery red, dark blue, and sulfurous yellow, possibly indicating variety of personalities and powers among the demons. The heads of the horses will resemble the heads of lions, majestic and terrifying. From the mouths of the horses will come fire, smoke, and sulfur (comparable to the three colors of the demons' breastplates). Through these three plagues-like weapons one-third of the people on earth will die horrible deaths. In addition to the power that comes from the mouths of the

horses there will be deadly power in their tails. Their tails will resemble serpents, serpents with heads that can inflict suffering and death as well. A more terrifying image can hardly be imagined!

In spite of massive death on the earth the survivors stubbornly refused to repent (9:20-21).

This world will undergo severe judgment at the hands of the Lamb who is Lord. These judgments will include horrendous human destruction, natural devastation, and demonic domination. Death will remove fully half of the human population. These judgments should be enough to move even the most rebellious heart to repentance. However, those not killed by these judgments will still refuse to bow to Jesus Christ. They will not repent of their works or their ways. They will continue to worship demons represented by idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood—idols that cannot see, hear, or walk! They will refuse to repent of their murders, sorceries (this term can refer to poison, magic spells, and drugs), sexual immorality, and thieving ways. Pride, power, pleasure, and possessions will continue to dominate the human heart. More judgments will be necessary to break humankind's hold on the control of this world, preparing the way for the return of Jesus Christ. The world is in a spiritual battle, one with eternal consequences. Jesus Christ came to redeem us from our sins and restore us to a right relationship with God. Through faith in Jesus Christ alone can we enter into His loving and eternal salvation. But people in that future day will continue to resist Jesus Christ. People today continue to resist Him. Spiritual warfare is real, and the stakes couldn't possibly be higher. We live in the midst of spiritual realities and must depend on Jesus for spiritual victory. To ignore the spiritual realm is to court personal and even eternal disaster.