

“THE FIFTH AND SIXTH TRUMPETS.”

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Scripture Texts: Revelation 9:1-21

Introduction

In chapter one of Revelation Jesus appears to John in His resurrection glory. In chapters two and three Jesus dictates to John seven letters to seven churches. In chapter four Jesus calls John into the throne room of heaven and John describes for us an incredible scene of worship with strange creatures and 24 thrones.

Jesus tells John He is going to show him what soon must take place and that begins in chapter six when Jesus takes a scroll from the Father and begins to open the seals. The seventh seal shows that God’s people will not be ultimately harmed by the judgments that are to come.

As the sealed saints and martyrs offer up their prayers, God hears and answers with angels blowing seven trumpets. We have heard the first four in chapter eight, and now come to the next two in chapter nine.

The first four affected the created world, the earth, the sea, the rivers and the sky. The two in chapter nine affect human beings with destruction and death.

Seven angels blow seven trumpets that announce and set in motion the judgment of God on earth. This second cycle of events show God’s activity on earth from a different angle.

We continue to get vivid, even fantastic descriptions of various calamities on earth. While the intensity increases it still spares many. Some of it lasts only 5 months, some of it affects only a third of mankind. If there is not repentance a more thorough devastation awaits.

The fifth trumpet and the first woe, the plague of locusts.

Trumpet five is the first of the three woes directed against unbelievers.

As you can imagine those who take Revelation literally have a heyday with the images here in chapter 9. They expect to see in real life what John describes in his vision. But even literalists get tripped up here and start to waver, saying some of this is just too fantastic and is probably symbolism.

As we saw in the seals and in the earlier trumpets, we are being given prophecy in symbols. The question we should be asking is not how this will happen, but why this will happen and who will do it. The question is not what will the locust look like, but what do they mean?

Who is this star fallen from heaven?

Good angels are spoken of as coming down or being sent down, but this one falls down. Given the star is called he and given the association with the bottomless abyss and the names that are used of him in verse 11, which means The Destroyer, the fallen star is no doubt Satan.

Isaiah 14:12-15 “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn!
How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!
13 You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven;
above the stars of God I will set my throne on high;
I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north;
14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’
15 But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.

Jesus uses similar imagery in the NT:

Luke 10:18 And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

John’s vision is a picture of what it looks like *when all hell breaks loose on earth*, which has happened over and over again in history.

When Satan fell from heaven and from holiness and became the prince of darkness he filled the world with demons and wickedness. Hell pours forth smoke and darkness, deception and delusion, sin and sorrow, moral perversion and rebellion.

What is unleashed is what all unbelievers suffer on earth, torments of every kind, hardship, diseases, strife, insecurities, doubts, fears, despair and depression. They sense a meaningless to life to the point of wishing they could die. Sin brings suffering, wickedness brings woe.

Locusts are a powerful symbol for hell and the influence of hell in the world. Only those who have experienced a locust invasion can fully appreciate the power of this image. Locusts unleash an unbelievably terrible destruction, what they leave behind is hell-like.

What a picture of the power of hell and sin and moral rebellion. Satan and his demons rob men of all light and all truth, of peace and joy, of wisdom and understanding. Sin and rebellion bring about terrifying moral and spiritual darkness.

This can come to nations in the form of the terrible atrocities equated with war and terrorism. This can come to individuals in the form the wasting away of souls and conscience in sin and wickedness, guilt and shame.

These are the terrors that await all who have not been sealed by the blood of Jesus, who have not repented of their sins and confessed their need of a Savior.

Notice three things about this vision.

First, notice how the living creatures around the throne of God reflected His character and nature and these creatures reflect the character and nature of Satan. They are terrifying and revolting.

Second, notice the verbs are passive.

He was given the key to the shaft.
They were given power.
They were told not to harm the grass.
They were allowed to torment for five months.

What does that tell you? They can only do what they are given permission to do. God is in control of all that happens all the time. Even when everything seems out of control, even when all hell seems to be breaking loose, God is in control.

The golden crown is a symbol of ruling authority. This power that Satan and demons have is real, but it's also limited, it is permissive, only what God allows and no more. God doesn't allow Satan to destroy those who are sealed.

God determines what and who and when and how and how long and by whom all things will happen. Nothing will go farther or last longer than He intends and permits.

Third, remember, this is a trumpet. Even Satan's worst work is used by God as a warning to the wicked and a call to repentance. Satan can't keep God from using him as a pawn for God's own purposes.

He is a pawn for calling the wicked to repentance. And he is a pawn for bringing about his own destruction. Evil brings about evils own destruction. The evil Satan did at the cross, is the greatest evil, and that evil will lead straight to Satan's own destruction. Satan is a destroyer and he is his own destroyer.

As terrible as this first woe is there are two more yet to follow.

The sixth trumpet, the second woe, the plague of fire, smoke and sulfur.

This sixth trumpet and second woe is also the last warning to the inhabitants of the earth. The seventh trumpet will be too late.

The voice is from the altar of God. The judgment is the judgment of God who decides the hour and the day and the month and the year. God is sovereign. We must remind ourselves of that over and over again. I have a thousand times in the past two months. We must every day. We must counter Satan's lies and the fear and anxiety that rise up in us with this truth.

The nightmare vision continues. What is this army and is it to be taken literally?

Some have suggested this is an army from Russia or China or the Orient. Hal Lindsey in his famous best-seller, *Late Great Planet Earth*, says this vast army is from China.

Some suggest the horses' mouths are flamethrowers and the horses' tails are bombers. The locust used to be considered helicopters, now some are suggesting they are drones.

None of this would have had any meaning to John's readers two thousand years ago. This is Biblical symbolism. We want to get the overall impact of John's words without bogging down in details. What we have here are symbols all related to judgment.

Trumpet six is the sounding of the warning of God's wrath coming on all sin in answer to the prayers of His people. God sees their tears, God hears their cries, God knows the anguish of their hearts. Evil will not go unpunished forever, justice will not remain silent.

The Euphrates River was the region of all the great forces of destruction in the OT, Assyria (722), Babylon (606), and Persia. *A Euphratean judgment* simple means the unleashing of God's wrath and judgment in destruction and death.

This isn't just the picture of one war, but rather a picture of all wars, past, present and future. God has used military conquest to bring judgment against nations. He did it to Israel, Assyria, Babylon, ancient Greece, ancient Rome, Hitler's Germany, Russia, Japan.

But death and destruction come in so many ways, not just wars, cancer and disease, accidents, terrorists, earthquakes and tsunamis, murders, mass killings, ethnic cleansings, any kind of destruction.

Ten thousand times ten thousand is 100,000,000 times two is 200,000,000. Literally this would be translated double myriads of myriads where a myriad is usually 10,000. The meaning is a huge incalculable number.

This is a symbolic number meaning a huge host, an extraordinary assembly. The forces of evil are great, but not greater than the forces of God. As great and tenacious as the army of evil is, the progress of the Gospel will lead to victory.

Can you imagine God unleashing a judgment that would kill a third of mankind? Can you imagine one seventh of the earth's population being killed? Abortion alone in the world has killed over a billion people, a seventh of the population. All of a sudden we see how real this possibility is.

Application and Conclusion.

Like Pharaoh in the OT, so John says they don't repent.

Rather than worship God, they worshiped idols. If we don't worship God who made us, then we will worship gods of our own making. They worship gods that cannot save them and in fact hand them over to judgment.

Rather than love their neighbor they murder, commit adultery and steal. These sins are the symptoms of rejecting God and pursuing idolatry, these sins flow from the first sin.

And unrepentant people don't get better, they get worse. Left to themselves they fall deeper and deeper, deceiving and being deceived.

The purpose of God's interim judgements is to warn and bring about repentance. The whole point of the death of a third of mankind is to warn the two thirds and move them to repentance. The purpose of warnings is to wake up and take heed and respond. Do something, don't just ignore it.

In chapter nine of Revelation is a reminder to us of the source and nature of sin and evil. God wants us to see and feel the horror of sin so that we will be convinced that He is good and so that we will see all His commands as good.

His commands aren't meant to make our lives miserable or to deny us pleasure. Rather His commands are meant to insure our true pleasure found in what is right and holy. God's commands are meant to keep us from the devil's lies and traps and snares.

God's commands don't keep us from good things, they protect us from evil things.

The vision of Chapter nine is truly eye opening. God's judgment is painful and terrifying. We need to respond to the message of this chapter. We need to cultivate a deeper hatred of our sin. We need to plead with God for greater grace to resist temptation and turn from evil.

Revelation pulls back the mask of temptation and sinful pleasure and earthly lusts and desires and exposes their true nature. They are lies, snares, traps, Satan disguised as an angel of light. Flee from all that is not of God.

C.S. Lewis: “We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” (*The Problem of Pain*, 93).

And when we refuse to turn to God in our pain, we are without hope. This will become clear when the contents of the seven bowls are poured out in chapters 15 and 16, God’s final wrath.

This should make us all tremble at the tremendous power sin has in the human heart and the terrible bondage it can hold on people. To have so great a warning and yet to still refuse to repent is a very scary thing. Let us pray against such a hardness of heart in ourselves and in those we know and love.

When we come under the heavy hand of God’s discipline, we should pray not for the removal of His heavy hand, but for the grace to turn that discipline into blessing and righteousness, that it will deliver us from a hard heart, that He will sanctify us fully.

We should tremble at how our world makes light of all the signs of God’s judgment, of all the warnings He inflicts on our planet, yet they go unheeded, or ignored, or dismissed as Mother Nature. We should tremble over God’s displeasure with sin.

And we should tremble at the mercy and grace we have received that God should break open our hard hearts and give us repentance. Is there any remaining persistent stubbornness, is there any casual dismissiveness?

And we should tremble at the loving kindness of God that He delays so long in coming that more might repent. Indeed it is true, He is slow to anger.

Love the precious truth given to us in Scripture and rejoice greatly in the death it has delivered us from by proclaiming to us the truth concerning Jesus.