

The trumpets of judgement come as God's people pray

• Golden censer – Jesus' prayers make our prayers acceptable

• As a result of the praying something happens

• The world is summoned to repentance

• The next three judgements are spiritual

The fifth judgement is an invasion by evil spirits

• Satan is allowed to make some use of evil spirits

• Locusts – picture language from Joel

• They harm people

God sends upon the world trumpet-blasts – warning judgements to show the world what will eventually come upon it. The trumpets of judgement come as God's people pray. John sees a vision of seven angels. In John's vision, heaven is like the holy place of the tabernacle. An altar is there (like the small altar of incense in the ancient tabernacle). The angel had a golden censer (a dish hanging at the end of a chain; the dish holds burning incense). Incense stands for everything God does to make our prayers acceptable. It specially represents Jesus' praying for us. The incense and the praying went up to God together. Jesus' prayers make our prayers acceptable.

As a result of the praying of God's people something happens^{□1}. Prayer makes things happen! The fire on the altar represents the holiness of God. The same censer that had been used for incense is now used to carry coals of fire taken from the burning altar. The holiness of God leads him to act in judgement. He throws his judgements upon the earth, as his people pray. God rules the world, and his decisions take effect as his people pray. The gospel goes out. The world is summoned to repentance.

There is a distinction between the first four trumpet blasts and the next three. This is emphasized in 8:13. *And I was looking, and I heard an eagle, flying in mid heaven, saying with a great voice, 'Woe, woe, woe for them that dwell on the earth, by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, who are yet to sound.'* The first four judgements could be called 'ordinary' judgements or 'natural' judgements. But the fifth judgement introduced by the blowing of the fifth trumpet is something more spiritual. An eagle or vulture normally flies down upon the carcass of some living creature that has died.

The fifth judgement is an invasion by evil spirits. ¹*Then the fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from heaven to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss.* The Abyss is the place where demons are imprisoned until their final judgement^{□1}. It is elsewhere called Tartarus; it is the temporary hell before the final hell which is called Gehenna or the lake of fire^{□2}. 'The star' is Satan. He used to shine with bright holiness. Satan is a fallen angel. He was once a bright angel but rebelled against God. Satan has a limited amount of power. He is given the key to the place where evil spirits live. He is allowed to make some use of them.

²*When he opened the shaft of the Abyss, smoke rose up out of it, like the smoke of a great furnace. And the sun and the sky were darkened because of the smoke that came from the Abyss.* Smoke speaks of obscurity, inability to see. Satan is able to cause spiritual blindness in the unsaved (remember 2 Corinthians 4:3). ³*And out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth; and power was given them, just as scorpions on the ground have power to hurt people.* The book of Revelation uses picture language taken from the book of Joel (written at the time of a locust plague). The locusts with scorpion-like power to sting speak of powerful evil forces. ⁴*They were told that they should not harm the grass of the earth, or any green plant, or any tree, but they could harm only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.* Evil spirits harm people. They do not attack trees or the ground, but they attack people. ⁵*These locusts were not allowed to kill people, but only to torture them for five months. The pain that the people felt was like the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a person.* The description resembles Exodus 10:4–15; Joel 1:7–12. These spiritual

□1 8:5

□1 compare 1 Peter 3:19; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Revelation 20:1, 3

□2 20:14,15

• *But not the people of God*

powers cannot attack the people of God. Satan has no power over the people of God – unless we allow him to have that power. When Satan attacks us he is pretending to have a power he does not really have. He uses bluff and only is able to attack us when given special permission. But we ourselves can give Satan an opening, unnecessarily. Ephesians 4:27 tells us anger especially gives Satan an opening into our life. Forgiveness and love protect us.

• *Terrible suffering*

The total picture gives us a symbolical foretaste of the satanic attacks that come on the world via evil spirits. There will be times when the world will go through terrible sufferings that come through Satan’s sending evil spirits upon the world. In the symbolism here they are short but terrible. ‘Five months’ is a limited period of time. ‘Five’ is often used to mean ‘a few’. In 1 Corinthians 14:19, ‘five words’ means short, limited talk. In Isaiah 30:17 (‘five of you will chase a hundred’), ‘five’ means ‘a few’. John says: ⁶*During those five months people will seek death, but they will not have their wish fulfilled. They will long to die, but death will flee from them.* There will be times when men and women will want to commit suicide and yet will draw back at this final act of self-murder. (One reads, for example, of the short period of time during the partition of India in 1947 when a million died in terrible circumstances, and many more were close to suicide.) ^a

• *But for a limited time*

• *A symbolic but fearful description*

The terrible pain of such times is put to us symbolically in a fearful description. ⁷*The appearance of the locusts was like that of horses prepared for battle. Upon their heads they had what seemed to be crowns of gold. Their faces were like human faces. ⁸They had hair like the hair of women. Their teeth were like lions’ teeth. ⁹They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of many chariots drawn by horses rushing into war. ¹⁰They had tails and stings like those of scorpions, and with their tails they had their power to hurt people for five months.*

• *Satanically inspired*

Back behind these terrible attacks upon the world are the influences and agents of Satan. There are obviously evil spirits powerfully at work at such times. ¹¹*They have a king ruling over them – the angel of the Abyss. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek language he has the name Apollyon, ‘Destroyer’.* The ruler of these demonic powers is Satan. His basic work is to destroy.

• *Satan is a destroyer*

• *Warnings from God*

The point of the fifth trumpet – as of the others – is to let us know that events in the world with demonic power behind them are part of the warnings of God. They are trumpet blasts calling us to find salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Note: a. P. French, *Liberty or Death: India’s Journey to Independence and Division* (HarperCollins, 1998).



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