

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Revelation		Pastor/Teacher
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THE FIFTH TRUMPET: THE FIRST WOE AND THE DEMONIC SWARM

According to the Bible, disease and natural disasters aren't blind effects with blind causes. They are divinely-inspired visual aids to help us see ultimate reality. They are flashing lights designed to save us from a greater catastrophe. Jesus calls war, disease, and natural disasters labor pains. As such, they're actually a kindness of God. They're like a contraction that tells you to pack your bags and run to the hospital. They're like a fever spike and loss of taste that sends you to the ER. They're like an advance warning system that tells you to seek higher ground and avoid the tsunami wave. The Christian God claims to rule over all creation. Natural events are not outside his control.¹

Review: John describes the judgment that God will bring upon the earth in three series of seven judgments each. God's judgment falls on the earth as well as on humankind. That is, the entire fallen creation is affected by the destructive wrath of God. The description of God's judgments emphasizes the evil nature of the forces opposed to God, and it underlines the sovereignty of the almighty God whose power nothing and nobody can withstand. The description of God's judgment is accompanied by God's assurance for his people, who are safe since they belong to him, and by God's commission to witness to the truth of the gospel even in the midst of suffering, persecution, and martyrdom.²

- I.** The fifth angel trumpets the first woe. John saw a star fall from the sky. Stars appear in Revelation both as a part of the natural world and as symbols of leaders. In the seven letters to the churches, the stars referred to the spiritual leaders of the congregations. Here the star refers to an evil spiritual leader, the devil. The star that "was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss" (verse 1) is the same as "the angel of Abyss" mentioned in verse 11.
- II.** An abyss is a bottomless pit. This is a specific abyss, the darkness of hell, where Satan is kept "bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day" (Jude 6). Notice that John did not see the star fall from the sky. This star had fallen earlier (verse 1). Long ago God expelled Satan from heaven. The key that God gives Satan symbolizes that the devil does not have free rein on the earth. For example, Satan had to ask God for permission to test Job, and he does not have the power to release the evil angels on earth except by God's allowance.³
- III.** **The Old Testament background.** The fifth trumpet once again builds upon the pattern of the exodus plagues. The darkening of the sun and air in 9:2 again recall the ninth plague on Egypt (Exod. 10:21-23; cf. Rev. 8:12), while the destructive locusts allude to the eighth plague in which locusts cover the whole land of Egypt and consume all its plants and fruit such that "not a green thing remained" (Exod. 10:12-15; cf. Ps. 78:46). Locusts are included

among the covenant curses Yahweh threatens to send against Israel (Deut. 28:38; cf. 2 Chr. 7:13; Joel 1:4; Amos 4:9). Locusts always devour vegetation, but in Revelation 9:4 they are instructed not to harm the grass, plants or trees (contrast 8:7) but instead to torture people without God's protective seal for five months.⁴

CONCLUSION: You will remember that in the letters to the seven churches the church at Philadelphia was promised protection from the hour of trial. Dispensationalists point to this as proof of a pretrib rapture. Will the Philadelphians be protected from the hour of trial, or removed out of it? The Greek preposition *ek* can mean either "from" or "out of," and those who opt for the latter consider this verse major evidence for a pre-tribulation rapture, in which God will remove the saints "out of" this world before the end-times hour of trial occurs. However, there is a close parallel to this verse in John 17:15, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you *protect them from* (the same Greek as here) the evil one." This view is more likely in this context, meaning that God will protect his people from the judgments to come. In fact, this promise has a literary function in the book that will be acted out in nearly every chapter. God will protect the saints from the judgments that he will pour out upon the nations. The saints are sealed (7:2, 3), and the judgments of the seals, trumpets, and bowls fall on the earth-dwellers and not on the believers (9:4, like the Egyptian plagues). It is important to understand that this does not mean Christians are exempt from suffering. Persecution and martyrdom are major components of this book. The saints are protected spiritually rather than physically; their suffering will be their victory. What they are exempt from are God's judgments. Believers will be protected from the wrath of God against unbelievers, but not from the wrath Satan and his minions direct at them.⁵

Chris Gordon, a Reformed pastor, recently wrote on the subject of fire from the throne. "The reason things are not going well and why it feels like everything is going to hell in a hand basket is because temporary judgments are being issued from the throne room of heaven. You cannot have this kind of chaos, disorder, abuse, sickness, and confusion part from what David called the heavy hand of the Lord. But Christians, by and large, seem afraid to talk about God's temporary judgments. For clarity, I'm not talking about the Pat Robertson kind of stuff, namely, that God is judging because of some specific group of sinners. Jesus corrected that thinking in Luke 13. Let's move on from that to a right understanding of dark providence. We sing from the psalms that Christ "judges the nations" and executes justice on oppressors, as the wrath of God is revealed from heaven in the present (Rom. 1:18ff). We are told from the book of Revelation (a book meant to encourage the church in times of great persecution and satanic assault by the corrupt, beastly governments of this world), that God, in answering our cries and prayers, throws fire back down on the earth. That this fire comes in the forms of the *earth burning up* or the *sea becoming blood* or the *water becoming bitter* is meant to be understood as God answering the cries of his elect (see Rev. 8). Why then are Christians falling apart in shock over the things that are happening on the earth? The governmental grabs for power, the ungodly responses, and the many oppressions in the earth by the wicked, are desperate attempts to *save Babylon* from heaven's divine blows. Yet, we act like we can stop this and *save America*. We sit in front of our computers and yell angrily at the wicked for taking our *freedoms and rights* as if our purpose is to bring calm to the storm in America through activism, *on social media*. Does anyone stop and think for a minute that what we are facing are *symptoms* of the world's panicked response due to divine judgments from the throne? God hears the cries of his people; when we pray, he repays, this is what deliverance from Egypt by plague should have taught us."⁶

ENDNOTES

¹ Elliot Clark, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/god-wants-blame-climate-change/>

² E. Schnabel, *40 Questions About The End Times* (Kregel, 2011), p. 55.

³ W. D. Mueller, *Revelation: People's Bible Commentary* (Concordia, 2005), p. 96.

⁴ B. J. Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone* (IVP, 2019), p. 151.

⁵ G. R. Osborne, *Revelation Verse by Verse* (Lexham Press, 2016), p. 78.

⁶ I encourage you to read the entire article, *A Much Better "Activism" for Christians in America*, Abounding Grace Radio.