

Getting Started:

There are several things we need to remember as we continue the 7 trumpet judgements.

1. The amount of space John devotes to describing the trumpet judgments is noteworthy. The seal judgments occupy two chapters (Ch. 6 & 7) and the trumpet judgements take up four chapters (Ch. 8:2 - 11:19-18)
2. The interlude between trumpet 6 & 7 takes almost two chapters (Ch. 10:1 – 11:14) to describe whereas the interlude between seals 6 & 7 takes just one chapter to describe (7:1-17).
3. The trumpet judgments prepare us for what could be considered the thematic center of Revelation (Ch.'s 12-14) (Keener).

The first 6 trumpets paint a very bleak picture of the earth and the unsealed people on it. Like the seal judgements, creation experiences a reversal and people have nowhere to find shelter from the chaos that ensues. The critical difference between the seals and trumpets is that what happens to the people of the earth is considerably more graphic. The appearing locusts drive people to the place where they long for death, but it doesn't come. Obviously whatever is happening is horrific.

The release of the four angels and the vast army that follows with instructions to kill 1/3 of the people of the earth certainly adds to the intense nature of the judgments. It is the closing words of Ch. 9 that identify the purpose behind the first 6 trumpet judgments – repentance. God's goal in directing things as he has is to focus people's attention and to remind them that his judgement comes with mercy so that repentance is sought. The unfortunate and disappointing result is however that the wicked heart of people remains unmoved and unchanged.

The core:

Like the interlude between the 6th and 7th seals, this interlude is both significant and intriguing. Significant because of the space devoted to it and intriguing because of its content. Whereas the seal interlude (Ch. 7) seems to have a positive tone, this interlude is more somber.

Remember, as Jon Mark Olesky has pointed out, the 7 seals highlight the triumph of the gathered church (Jew and Gentile), and the 7 trumpets highlight the punishment of the world for its rejection of God. As this concerns John's fellowship with the churches in tribulation, kingdom, and perseverance (1:9), is it possible that Ch. 10 & 11 function to help the churches see the crucial role they play in proclaiming the gospel to an unrepentant world (Swindoll).

God's certainly making himself sovereignly known (1:7, 8), and the earth is certainly seeing what will be (1:19), but could Ch. 10 & 11 be about detailing what the churches need to learn about witnessing to the sin broken world they inhabit through John's vision?

Peterson frames the question addressed in Ch. 10 & 11 this way,

“Out of the silence in heaven in which the prayers of the Christians are heard (8:2), God prepares to speak (8:3, 4). He speaks (8:5-9:21). His speaking is, in some mysterious but unmistakable way, connected with the prayers. The history-making, kerygmatic (*proclamation*) speech of God is trumpeted by the angels (Ch. 8 & 9). Terrific consequences follow. But there is another more modest speech that is also important. The words we speak to God (incense-prayers) are powerful; we are assured of that. The words God speaks to humankind (the trumpet-preaching) are awesome; we are convinced of that. But how about the words we speak that report on our God-directed speech, and God’s earth targeted Gospel? In comparison with such praying and such preaching, can it mean much that I stutter out God’s word in my daily conversational encounters among people who would rather hear almost anything else? That is the hesitancy addressed by Revelation 10 and 11, and the answer is emphatic: by all means, yes!”

10:1-4 The Strong Angel:

Angels play a significant role in Revelation concerning God’s plan for creation and history. There are over 60 references to them in Revelation and of 3 references to strong angels, this is the second. The first occurs in 5:2 with a strong angel’s question about opening the seals of the scroll. John gives us no indication of who this angel is. Many have speculated on this angel’s identity, yet without solution. Keener and Wilcock suggest that the angel “resembles Jesus”, but that’s as far as they will venture. John’s point is not to identify the angel. His point is to highlight the angel’s features and function.

Features – The rainbow may well indicate mercy, the sun - majesty, the fire pillared feet guidance (as of Israel through the Exodus), his booming voice – authority, etc. His one foot resting on the sea, and the other on dry land describes that what he has to say affects the whole world. The angel represents the realm and the throne of God and heaven’s interests. This angel has come straight from the presence of God.

Function – For the seven churches, the very fact that a strong angel comes down from heaven and touches the earth was probably a great comfort to the suffering churches. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews says this to his hearers about the role angels in the believer’s life

Are they (angels) not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation? (Heb. 1:14),

Given the horror that has unfolded in the course of the first 6 trumpets, the presence of the strong angel here is a potent reminder to the churches that there is an unseen part of creation of which they need to be aware. As Eugene Peterson points out,

The belief in angels represents a recognition that “God’s world . . . is far richer than what can be seen on our planet.

While we need to exercise caution in our speculation concerning the details about the ministry

of angels (some Bible teachers have taken this subject to unhealthy extremes), we must be aware that God's care for his people is administered by his angelic realm. Take for example the note Matthew makes concerning what Jesus experienced following his desert temptations,

Then the devil left him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to him. (Matt. 4:11)

By the way, don't miss the seven peals of thunder. As John unfolds Revelation for his readers they are reminded of perfection and completion in the voice of the angel who speaks.

As well, the angel holds a little scroll. We don't know its content but, whatever it is, John must digest it. The bottom line is that this strong angel is preparing John for important spiritual work that he will carry out.

10:4-7 John told not to write:

Oddly, you'd expect the angel to tell John to write, as in Ch. 1, what the peals of thunder reveal. But just the opposite occurs and we're not told why. Speculations abound. But as Ed Neufeld points out, the simplest interpretation is that God's not telling everything he knows. This makes good sense. Obviously God knows more than he's telling John, but there are two pressing issues God makes known to John and his readers.

First, "there will be delay no longer." (10:7). Caird sees in this a reference to Daniel where he in a vision sees two men talking. The one asks the other, "How long will it be until the end of these wonders?" (Dan. 12:6) Daniel then hears the other's reply, "It would be for a time, times, and half a time, and as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be completed." As this relates to John, Caird sees the strong angel's declaration of a delay no longer as the richer fulfilment of Dan 12:6, 7.

Second, "the mystery of God is finished, as he preached to his servants the prophets." We aren't told what the mystery is, but Craig Keener offers us this,

"The divine 'mystery' here seems to involve God's kingdom. God's purposes will be 'accomplished' as promised to 'his servants the prophets.'"

He points out that the idea of "mystery" is connected not to something that's hidden from humanity. Mystery involves things that were declared in the First Testament which were now coming into reality in the New Testament.

Also important is that all this is given under solemn oath. God's kingdom, his rule, which was preached from as far back as the OT prophets will become a reality without doubt, and nobody can stop it.

Again for the seven churches who were to hear what was being read, this is both good and bad news. For the faithful this is good news. They know the end of all things is near and they'll be rescued, and God's kingdom established. For the compromising and caving in churches this is bad news. There is still time to clean up their act but that time is gone. Think about dad and mom calling the kids, as they are driving up the driveway, with instruction to clean up the house. Hear the car brakes squeaking and the kids scramble to make sure the house is in order. For the suffering faithful this is a word of assurance, for the compromising or caving in, accountability.

10:8-11 John told to eat the book:

We aren't told about the book's contents. What we're told is that the angel holds a booklet (10:2), not a full size book. John hears the seven thunderous voices speak, but what he hears he is told not to write down. John is, however, given instruction to eat the booklet. The act of eating it symbolizes the internalizing of its contents. Ironically, what he eats is sweet on the tongue but bitter to the stomach (10:10). It will taste good, but it won't sit well. This is a good news/bad news message.

G.B. Caird notes that the eating of the book is probably meant to bring forward images of God's commission to Ezekiel to eat the scroll God gives him (Ezek. 2 & 3). Ezekiel is being prepared by God for a difficult task. He will go to a people with flint foreheads. This is to say that the people he will speak to are exceedingly hard headed (unrepentant?). To prepare Ezekiel God makes this prophet's head even harder than the peoples' heads to whom he will speak. God makes Ezekiel's head like emery (corundum) (Ezek. 3:8 – 9). This mineral on Mohs hardness scale (1-10) is 9, exceedingly hard and durable. Ezekiel must be completely determined to speak boldly and without fear. So must John.

All this affects what comes next as John is told that he must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings (10:11). Remember, John is already in trouble with Rome because of his preaching (1:9). God's telling John that although he is in exile his task is not complete. There is more to do. In view of the fact that there will be no further delay and that the mystery is finished, there is an urgency to John's task.

Application for the 7 churches

Regarding the 7 churches, this part of the trumpet interlude involves John, but it speaks to them. It probably reminds them of their need to stay focused and to stay passionate in view of the fact God's kingdom was near and that the time of delay is past. If the role of the prophet is to "fling themselves into active life as antagonists of the prevailing system" (Moulton), then the churches had quite a task on their hands. Some did fling themselves as antagonists and paid the price. Others minimized their flinging thereby lowering the price they'd pay, and in some cases avoided it completely. The churches task is always to stand as a beacon of light in a dark world.

Paul was very clear to the Philippians when he reminded them that they were to,

“do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain not toil in vain.” (Phil 2:14-16).

Making it Real:

Remember the seven Churches were to “. . . hear the words of the prophecy and to heed the things that were written in it . . .” This means all of Revelation applies to them as they existed in AD 95 and to all the faithful until the Lord’s return. To suggest that only Ch. 1-3, and 21, 22 apply to the church, as some suggest, is to misunderstand what was said to John. The whole prophecy of this book (Ch. 1-22) applies to the church. As such it is important to continue to ask the question, how would the church have received what Ch. 10 says? What were they to understand practically from it?

Craig Keener provides several key thoughts.

1. The Strong angel was meant to remind the church that even in the midst of God’s judgement on the earth, he has everything under control. For the churches this is something that they would have sorely needed especially when it seemed, from a horizontal point of view, that the world looked quite the opposite. With Rome exercising its power without any sense of accountability to, or response from God, they needed to know that God had not abandoned them. The angel described as he is, standing as he is, speaking as he did, meant to visualize the extent and depth of God’s presence and control.
2. “The thunders reveal that some matters are not yet ours to know. . . God rules the future, but we do not need to know the details. He’s not guaranteed us such knowledge, especially about the final details before the delay is over. In this light it’s important for Christians to be wary of modern day preachers who espouse themselves as prophets, or prophecy experts, who have special insight in to the future. These preachers seem to misunderstand the essential role of the prophet and instead reveal in the fantastic predictions they trumpet. Too many have already fallen by the wayside. The great problem with too many prophecy teachers is that they have to keep revising their predictions in light of historical changes that have ruined their original insights. The Y2K fiasco should be warning enough to thoughtful believers. **How is our discernment growing in relation to the many voices that are out there? (Cite Jim Bakker’s – PTL – most recent escapades re Get Ready Expo stockpiling food he sells for the end times)**
3. The fact God has said to John that there will be no more delay ought to encourage us. The churches of Revelation needed to hear this.
4. “We should follow John’s example, obeying even when the message we are called to proclaim proves bitter or does not make sense to us.” God’s message is always sweet to the one who follows him by faith, even though it can be tough to proclaim.

5. As we said with regard to Ch. 9, God is concerned for all people, Jew and Gentile alike. The prophet is called to, without bias, proclaim God's truth wherever they are. John spoke to the Romans which is what put him on the Isle of Patmos but he also spoke to God's people. **He was true to his calling, are we? What if we're not called as prophets?** No matter what our call is, speaking to others about Jesus through whatever role we play in God's kingdom is our highest priority.

Let me add a 6th point.

6. Many Christians have a hard time speaking up for the Lord (witnessing). Often I have heard believers excuse themselves from witnessing, letting themselves off the hook, by suggesting that "talk is cheap" or that words are not nearly as effective as action (deeds). Some have even gone as far as quoting Francis of Assisi, "Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary." Sadly this is a severe misquote. Assisi never said this. He did talk about expressing one's faith through deeds, but never to suggest the superiority of deeds over words in significance.

Ch. 10 reminds us that God wants both words and action to be part of the Christian witness. Remember, John is told that he must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings (10:11). Also remember, the primary function of a prophet is not nearly so much about foretelling the future as it is boldly forth telling, "Thus saith the Lord!" By digesting the little scroll John is internalizing God's truth in order to have it come out in his life in an effective way. This includes both words and deeds as a vital part of the Christian life and witness. John is on the island of Patmos in exile because of his witness of Christ. The Revelation is made up of words God gave him to share with others, and he did. This got him into trouble.

I have to wonder if we prefer the silent witness of deeds in place of words because deeds are far less controversial and less likely to draw criticism and mocking. Ch. 10 invites us to work on our words and to use them effectively for God's kingdom.

Even more pointedly, are we digesting God's word so that we have something useful to share with those to whom we witness?