

Getting Started

Let's recap the trumpet judgments. Ch. 8 begins with God hearing the anguished prayers of his people. In response, an angel takes their prayers and uses them to deal with their persecutors in a series of judgments. Using the imagery of the Exodus plagues, trumpets 1-4 involve the reversal of creation. And trumpets 5 & 6 involve a severe, but merciful judgement of people aimed at their repentance from their sin. Unfortunately, repentance doesn't occur. Before the 7th trumpet (11:15-18) blows there is an interlude (pause) in the action (Ch. 10, 11) just as there was a pause (Ch. 7) between the 6th and 7th seals.

Why a pause? Some think that it acts as a literary device to heighten the story that develops. Others think that God uses it to specifically address and encourage the churches personally within the cycles of judgment. Still others suggest that the pause is God's opportunity to add further information.

The pause in the seal judgments (Ch. 7) reminded God's people that they are sealed and kept, and will one day victoriously reign in worship over their tormentors and persecutors. With the trumpet judgments pause God reminds the churches (Ch. 10 & 11) that even though their tormentors and persecutors remain stubborn and unrepentant, the churches are to stand firm through John's example. Remember, John and the churches share a spiritual kinship in Jesus that mutually includes their need to persevere for the sake of the kingdom even though facing tribulation (1:9).

In Ch. 10, God sends a strong angel to John with a message to proclaim to the nations. For the moment though, while the message is sweet on John's lips it doesn't sit well in him because of its content. And while God doesn't reveal everything he knows to John, he reveals enough for John to proclaim God's message with confidence.

This is important for the churches to understand. Ch. 10 helps them understand the uneasy feelings they might have because of the message of Jesus. Also, it helps them know that God has not left them alone. His strong angel stands with them. But they must remain faithful even though they don't understand everything God is allowing to happen to them, or to their persecutors. Paul held a similar position (1 Cor 1:18).

Although the message of Jesus left each church with sweet albeit uneasy feelings, Philadelphia and Smyrna dealt with their uneasiness by continuing to conquer and overcome in faithful witness. Thyatira, Sardis, and Pergamum dealt with their feelings by comprising their witness, and Ephesus and Laodicea by caving in.

As a practical application, Ch. 10 helps us understand why we might be hesitant to witness. We love the message of Jesus because it's sweet to us, but it also leaves us with uneasy feelings. For followers of God there will be a continuing tension between the sweetness of Jesus, and how his

message makes us feel when we think about ministering to our sin-broken world. This is especially true when the world responds to the message of Jesus in us in negative ways.

If Ch. 10 encouraged the churches this way, what kind of encouragement does Ch. 11 offer?

The core:

Craig Keener has observed that Ch. 11 is probably one of the most difficult chapters in the Revelation to interpret. This is so primarily because of questions surrounding the measuring of the temple and the identity of the two witnesses. Are these to be interpreted literally or symbolically?

The connection between Ch. 10 & 11:

The Bible project makes an interesting proposal concerning the connection between Ch. 10 and the little book in the angel's hand (10:9), John's call to further prophecy (10:11), and content of Ch. 11. It suggests that Ch.11 is actually the content of the little book's message. Ch. 11 explains why John's message is both sweet and bitter. As one reads Ch.11, and the drama that unfolds, the contrast between sweet and bitter becomes very apparent. There's sweetness in measuring the temple, and yet bitterness in the trampling of the court; and there's bitterness in how the two witnesses are killed by the beast that arises from the abyss, and yet sweetness in their resurrection. All of this then culminates in the blowing the 7th trumpet and the absolute exaltation of Jesus.

Others have suggested that Ch. 10 & 11 serve as the thematic center of the Revelation. It explains in summary detail the flow of the Revelation's message.

The Temple. There isn't a lot of detail given here about the temple, but what is said is important. Remember that at the time of The Revelation's writing (AD. 95), the temple had already laid in ruins for 25 years. The Roman army led by the future Emperor Titus, and with Tiberius Julius Alexander as his second-in-command, besieged and conquered Jerusalem which had been occupied by its Jewish defenders in 66 AD. From AD 70 onward, although Jerusalem rose once again, the temple was never rebuilt.

This has led some scholars to think that since this is a vision, the temple John sees has a symbolic meaning. John sees the temple and is given a rod to measure it, the altar, and its worshipers. The Greek word "naos" translated as "temple" is quite specific as a descriptor of the temple's inner part known as the Holy Place and Holy of Holies in contrast to the entire temple complex.

Many conservative Christian scholars see this description as a rebuilding of a literal future temple. Given that in AD 95 the temple lay in ruins, what was John seeing? A number of other conservative scholars see here not a literal rebuilding of the temple but a description of God's people, both Old and New Testament, as the whole church. We may have a hard time seeing this due to our inherited method of interpretation (dispensationalism). Interestingly, Paul uses

the word “naos” when he makes reference to God’s people (redeemed Jew and Gentile) being God’s Holy Temple in Eph. 2:21.

The one feature that is missing in terms of measurement is the outer court which has been given to the nations. Also mentioned is that for a period of time, the holy city will be trampled by the nations.

Understood symbolically the implication is that the church can expect that they will be on the receiving end of much abuse by the nations because of the message of Jesus. However, even though the church is being trampled upon and torn apart by strife from the world for a period of time, there is an essential element (temple/altar/worshipers) that does remain intact.

Remember, John was given a mandate to proclaim to the nations the sweet but uneasy message of Jesus (10:11), and now (Ch.11) the world responds to them in negative ways. The prospect of trampling is not a pleasant thought to contemplate. Yet in the midst of all the destruction, the church remains intact. It can be measured.

From a practical standpoint think about how the church in centuries past has remained intact in the face of repeated attempts to annihilate it. As believers, our perspective lies not in the present state of the church, but in God’s faithfulness preserving what he has brought to life in Christ. Think about God’s people in the time of Egyptian bondage, and the exile to Babylon etc. These are significant times of the trampling of God’s people.

The Two Witnesses

Who are these witnesses? The range of possibilities is broad. Grant Richison has noted,

“Some think that these witnesses are Elijah and Moses but the Book of Revelation does not specify who they are. There is some evidence for one of these witnesses being Elijah because Malachi prophesied that he would come back before the day of the Lord comes (4:5). Both Moses and Elijah were in the Transfiguration scene of Christ (Matthew 17:3). Others think that these two witnesses are Enoch and Elijah. Yet others see the two witnesses as the two functions of the church in its bringing the law and prophets.”

Eugene Peterson adds that the two witnesses recasts the story of the transfiguration of Jesus on Mt. Tabor. He says,

The unnamed witnesses of Ch. 11 are the named witnesses of transfiguration, Moses and Elijah. The two men, great in their own right, through the centuries accumulated symbolic greatness: Moses the giver of the Law, and Elijah, exemplar of prophecy. Between them these two directed the attention of all humanity to Christ as Lord and Savior – God in our history for our salvation. Law and prophecy are the content of all witness.

He makes this interesting observation,

St. John’s vision recasts that story to show the importance, the danger and finally, the inviolability of Christian witness.

I gather from Richison that it is best to focus on the role of these witnesses rather than pursuing specific identities. They witness powerfully, and yet are treated very much like Jesus. Pay careful attention to this. They come and prophesy faithfully and powerfully. The number 1260 days is given. Connecting Daniel with the Revelation, Craig Keener observes that this number likely refers to the kind of time rather than the length of time,

. . . Revelation is borrowing Daniel's figure not to tell us the length of time but to inform us of the kind of time, that the era of the church is characterized by great suffering, as in Daniel's 1260 days.

The witnesses are mistreated and persecuted, and killed. Their bodies are improperly left to rot in the streets which suggests a mocking gesture. And those who killed them celebrate the witnesses' demise by the exchange of gifts.

The fact that lampstands are included in the description have led some to conclude that the witnesses in some way involves the church in its role as a priestly/royal entity (1:6). Whoever these witnesses are, they bear the marks of God's people and their death resurrection, and ascension trumpet God's vindication of them over their enemies. The point is that Ch. 11 identifies an intense level of suffering in which there is protection and vindication. And although the witnesses suffer, they ultimately prevail.

Probably the best way to interpret these figures is that they come with the powers of Moses and Elijah. Their main role is to prepare for the coming of the Messiah like John the Baptist prepared for the coming of Christ in the first advent." The description given (V.1-6) could fit several OT personalities, and the overall sketch seems to fit the person of Jesus. This almost seems like a composite sketch.

Another element that points to more of a composite sketch is the "great city" in which the witnesses die. This city is mystically called Sodom, Egypt, and has a resemblance to Jerusalem (11:8). John writing to the church in AD 95 could very well have been describing Rome as the latest embodiment of the evil that is hurled against God's people. Sodom certainly was this in Genesis and Egypt was obviously so in Exodus. Jerusalem took on this flavor in AD 33 when Jesus was crucified. Rome in AD 95 certainly had this flavor as it directed its energy to control and stamp out competing religious entities that might threaten its power.

Ironically, these two witnesses will miraculously rise from the dead 3 ½ days later and they experience an ascension reminiscent of Jesus. Finally, those who killed them are visited by an earthquake that has devastating effects on them and the ones who aren't killed by the earthquake give glory to God.

11:15-19 the 7th trumpet

This trumpet is a most glorious one. Yet, 11:14 describes the 7th trumpet as the 3rd woe. But why is something so glorious to be seen as a woe? Simply because the unrepentant world is now brought face to face with the resurrected, living and glorious Lord Jesus.

This reminds me of what Paul says in Phil. 2:9-11

For this reason also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and *that* every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The 7th trumpet heralds the complete and utter victory of God over his enemies. And just as important, those who follow God are completely vindicated. The scene of the 7th trumpet has all the earmarks of the throne room in Ch. 4, 5, and the interlude of Ch. 7. It returns us to worship as God intended it.

The final verse is overwhelming, and it should be. God now appears in all his splendor. The Ark of the Covenant and the Temple are all signs of his presence as they were in the OT. The peals of thunder and flashes of lightening, the earthquake and hailstones are reminiscent of how the trumpet judgements began (8:3-7). The trumpet judgements end as they began, with God in full control, and with his victory secure, and with all creation standing before him in accountability.

Making it real:

If Revelation 8-11 prepares us for the core of the book's message and the pastoral message John is communicating to the churches, Paul's evaluation of the relationship between pain and glory comes to mind,

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the sons of God. And not only this, but we ourselves, having the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it."(Romans 8:18-25)

Revelation's purpose is **to set pain and glory in context** so the churches continue to fulfill their reason for existence. Contrary to the picture some theological schemes paint concerning the end times, believers may well not be exempt from witnessing in Revelation what Paul talks about in Romans. The vision John shows the churches is designed to encourage them to faithfulness in the present because God will deal with a fallen creation that opposes him and his people who represent him as priests in his kingdom.

As such, what John experiences in Rev 10/11 is part of the pain/glory contrast that Paul discusses. For John this contrast occurs in the sweet/bitter process of eating the book he is given by Christ. This contrast is not only for John but for the churches, and us, as well.

Within the context of the blowing of the trumpets, like that of the seals, and all the attendant pain that comes with it, God's people, like John, are protected by God and ultimately victorious over their enemies. They don't achieve this victory and overcome their enemies by military

might, or any other human effort. They do so because of God's work on their behalf through Christ and they follow in his footsteps.

The overarching lesson to see here is the encouragement that God offers to his people while not necessarily taking them out of their setting.

This is reminiscent of Jesus' high priestly prayer for the disciples in John 17. **Read the prayer and pick out phrases that relate to what we have studied in Revelation so far.**

17 Jesus spoke these things; and raising His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, so that the Son may glorify you, just as you gave Him authority over all mankind, so that to all whom you have given Him, He may give eternal life. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on the earth by accomplishing the work which you have given me to do. And now You, Father, glorify me together with yourself, with the glory which I had with you before the world existed.

I have revealed Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have followed Your word. Now they have come to know that everything which You have given Me is from You; for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received *them* and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me. I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but on the behalf of those whom You have given Me, because they are Yours; and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. I am no longer *going to be* in the world; and *yet* they themselves are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, *the name* which you have given me, so that they may be one just as we *are*. While I was with them, I was keeping them in your name, which you have given me; and I guarded them, and not one of them perished except the son of destruction, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have my joy made full in themselves. I have given them your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I am not asking You to take them out of the world, but to keep them away from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

"I am not asking on behalf of these alone, but also for those who believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one; just as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

The glory which You have given Me I also have given to them, so that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and You loved them, just as You loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

"Righteous Father, although the world has not known you, yet I have known you; and these have known that you sent me; and I have made your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and I in them."