

REV. 8:1 –11:19

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VIII. Seventh seal - climactic divine intervention (8:1-11:19)

A. Prologue (8:1-5)

1. When the Lamb opens the scroll's seventh and final seal, there is dead silence in heaven for about half an hour. You talk about dramatic! This emphasizes the significance and awesomeness of the coming judgment that culminates in the eternal state. Osborne remarks (p. 337), "All in heaven are in breathless anticipation as they await God's final actions in bringing history to a close."

2. John sees *the* seven angels who stand before God. The use of "the" indicates that he is referring to a specific group of angels. Jewish apocalyptic writings speak of "the seven holy angels who present the prayers of the saints and enter into the presence of the glory of the Holy One" (Tob. 12:15). They are called archangels and have names (including Michael and Gabriel - 1 Enoch 20:2-8). In Lk. 1:19 the angel declares to Zacharias, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God," and Jude v. 9 refers to the archangel Michael.

3. These seven angels were given seven trumpets. Trumpets are often associated with the judgment of God in the O.T. (Isa. 27:13; Joel 2:1; Zeph. 1:16; Zech. 9:14), and in Jewish apocalyptic the trumpet often announced the eschatological judgment (2 Esdr. [4 Ezra] 6:23; Sib. Or. 4.173-174; Apoc. Abr. 31). In the N.T., trumpets announce the final judgment in Mat. 24:31, 1 Cor. 15:52, and 1 Thess. 4:16. So the appearance here of trumpets in the context of the final judgment is not surprising.

4. Another angel appears who is pictured as offering incense on the golden altar of incense before the throne in heaven. The earthly tabernacle and temple contained an altar of incense on which incense was offered to God by the priests (e.g., Lk. 1:11). The incense is mingled with the prayers of the saints. The point is that the angel, cast as a kind of heavenly priest, presents the prayers of the saints, perhaps referring specifically to the prayers of the martyrs for vengeance and justice in 6:9-11, as a fragrant offering to God (see, Ps. 141:2). The angel does *not* make the prayers acceptable; that is the work of Jesus Christ, the one mediator (1 Tim. 2:5). It is because they are acceptable through Jesus that the prayers are presented by the angel as a fragrant offering.

5. This priestly angel then becomes an avenging angel. No doubt in response to the command of God, he fills the censer with fire from the altar and throws it to the earth. Fire falling from heaven is a regular symbol in scripture of God's judgment (Gen. 19:24; Ex. 19:18; 2 Ki. 1:10-14; Ps. 11:6, 18:8; Lk. 9:54; Heb. 12:29). The thunder, rumblings, lightning, and earthquake indicate God's intervention, similar to the theophany at Sinai (Ex. 19:16ff). Smalley remarks (p. 217), "The descent of burning

coals from the heavenly altar, combined with the disturbances to nature signaled at the end of verse 5, therefore heralds the visitation of God to his world in judgment and his wrathful reaction to all evil and oppression."

6. The judgment here appears to be associated in some way with the prayers of the saints. Their cries do not go unheeded.

7. The divine judgment symbolized in the angel hurling to earth this fire from the heavenly altar is going to be developed and expanded upon as the angels sound their trumpets. In all of this, it is worth bearing in mind the words of Bruce Metzger in his commentary (p. 66):

We must remember that the objects and events seen in a vision are not physically real. As was mentioned earlier, Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezek. 37) and Peter's vision of a great sheet let down from heaven and filled with all kinds of unclean creatures (Acts 10) were perceived in a trance. Such things seen in a vision are not physically present. So too, in the book of Revelation the descriptions are not descriptions of real occurrences, but of symbols of the real occurrences. The intention is to fix the reader's thought, not upon the symbol, but upon the idea that the symbolic language is designed to convey.

B. First six trumpets (8:6 - 9:21)

1. The first four trumpets (8:6-12)

a. At the sounding of the first trumpet, hail and fire mixed with blood are hurled to the earth from heaven.

(1) Hail and fire (lightning?) were a means of God's judgment as early as the plague on Egypt in Ex. 9:13-35, which destroyed the vegetation. God hurled huge hailstones on the Amorite army in Josh. 10:11 and said in Job 38:22-23 that he reserves "storehouses of hail" for the day of battle and war. And, of course, God destroyed wicked Sodom and Gomorrah by raining down sulfur and fire out of heaven (Gen. 19:24; Lk. 17:29).

(2) The mixing of blood with the hail and fire heightens the psychological horror of the judgment. It not only leaves people surrounded by blood but also brings home that what they are experiencing includes God's vengeance for the blood of his saints (6:10, 16:6).

(3) The storm causes great devastation. A third of the earth and trees and all the grass are burned up. The fact locusts are told in 9:4 not to harm the grass of the earth after all the grass is said here to have been burned up is not a contradiction. These visions are not to be read like sequential depictions of literal occurrences. As Osborne notes (p. 351) "the reader is supposed to feel the impact of this

image as it is, not compare it to 9:4. Each vision is a self-contained unit in this sense" (though they certainly are connected as parts of a unit yielding an overall impression).

b. At the sounding of the second trumpet, something *like* a flaming mountain is thrown into the sea.

(1) It affects one third of the sea, turning it to blood, and a third of the living sea creatures died and a third of the ships were destroyed. One is reminded of the first plague on Egypt (Ex. 7:19-21) in which the rivers were turned to blood, but the effect of this judgment is far greater.

(2) Osborne states (p. 353), "Only a people directly dependent on sea traffic and food production could appreciate how terrible this would seem to the original readers. . . . The sea lanes were called the lifeblood of Rome, because the Romans were so dependent on the sea for both food and commerce (see also Rev. 18:17-19)."

c. At the sounding of the third trumpet, a blazing star named Wormwood falls from heaven. It affects one third of the inland waters turning them bitter and causing many deaths. This poisoning of the fresh water supply may again call to mind the first Egyptian plague involving the rivers.

(1) Wormwood is a plant with a very strong bitter taste. Though it is not poisonous, it became a symbol of judgment and death because those things are emotionally bitter. In the vision, this "fiery star turned the water poisonous, and the effect was as bitter as wormwood" (Osborne, 355).

(2) Ancients did not use the word "star" in our technical sense. The picture is of a gigantic meteorite ("shooting star") falling to earth with devastating consequences.

d. At the sounding of the fourth trumpet, God strikes the sun, moon, and stars.

(1) The first sentence suggests a quantitative extinguishment of these heavenly bodies, but the second sentence suggests a temporal extinguishment. The point seems to be that there is absolute darkness for one third of the day (no sun) and night (no moon or stars). The first sentence is a poetic way of saying that.

(2) Supernatural darkness is a form of divine punishment, as in the ninth plague on Egypt (Ex. 10:21-23) where there was three days of darkness. God symbolizes the final judgment with repeated allusions to the Egyptian plagues to say that at the final judgment he will powerfully punish the hostile forces that oppose and oppress his people as he punished the Egyptians who did the same.

e. The servants of God, those who have been sealed as his, are protected from this punishment, as Israel was protected from the plagues on Egypt (Ex. 8:22-23, 9:4, 9:26, 10:23, 11:7, 12:13). That is implied by the fact Rev. 7:3 says the harm to be inflicted on the earth, sea, and trees was delayed until the saints could be sealed. The protection of the saints with regard to the punishment symbolized by the events associated with the final three trumpet blasts is stated expressly in Rev. 9:4.

2. Warning about last three trumpets (8:13) – After the fourth trumpet, a grave warning is sounded by a bird of prey, either an eagle or a vulture. The bird seems to symbolize doom, the devouring of the flesh (see 19:17-18). The judgments accompanying the last three trumpets are going to be horrifying. The three woes are spoken to "the inhabitants of the earth," a semi-technical term for those opposed to God, and it is announced in 9:4 (see also 3:10, 9:20) that these plagues are not to fall upon the church, those who have been sealed.

3. Fifth trumpet (first woe) - demonic locusts (9:1-12)

a. The fifth angel blew his trumpet, and John saw a star that had fallen from heaven to earth. As the angels of the seven churches were represented by stars (1:20), this star also represents an angel, an agent of God's will. When angels are depicted as stars in such Jewish apocalyptic writings as 1 Enoch (dating from second century B.C. to early part of first century A.D.), "to fall" means no more than "to descend" (see, 1 Enoch 86:1, 86:3, 88:1). This angel may be the same as the angel in 20:1 who descends from heaven with the key to the Abyss.

b. The angel was given the key to the shaft that connects to "the Abyss." The word "abyss" (ἄβυσσος) literally means "bottomless pit." It originally was applied to the unfathomable depths of the sea and was used in the LXX to translate *tehom*, "the deep." It came to stand for the realm in which demonic spirits are incarcerated by God. In 1 Enoch the Abyss is portrayed as a horrible place with "great descending columns of fire," and in Lk. 8:31 the demons beg Jesus not to be sent there.

(1) I do not think the Abyss needs to be a literal place of physical confinement even though it is presented that way. Rather, I think the Abyss is a figurative description of the state of demonic spirits whose activities God has restricted in ways they hate, restrictions that torment them because they so strongly desire the greater freedom to express their evil natures. In other words, I think the Abyss is a symbolic depiction of the restraint of their power rather than a literal description of a restraint of their movement.

(2) Other texts that speak of confinement of spirits (Jude 6; 2 Pet. 2:4) have a symbolic flavor to them. For example, the reference in Jude 6 to spirits being bound by physical chains makes little sense if taken literally. And given that this is apocalyptic literature which commonly employs symbolic imagery, I think what I am suggesting is a reasonable possibility.

(3) If it is indeed a valid way of understanding the Abyss, then demons who are there, in the sense of having certain restrictions on their powers, can still interact with humans; they simply cannot engage in the prohibited activities. Those released from the Abyss are those for whom the particular restrictions have been lifted so they are free to harm to a greater extent than when they were bound. They have been "turned loose" in that sense.

c. When the shaft of the Abyss is opened, huge amounts of smoke pour out, indicating fires burning below, and demonic locusts descend out of the darkness that is caused by the smoke.

(1) Throughout the O.T. locusts are a symbol of destruction. They formed the eighth plague on Egypt (Ex. 10:12-20), and Joel interprets the devastation of Israel by locusts as an omen of the destruction that will come with the Day of the Lord.

(2) The demonic locusts are given power like scorpions in that they are given power to sting like scorpions. They are not allowed to go after any grass or greenery; instead they are directed toward God's enemies. What an absolutely terrifying picture: a cloud of scorpion-like locusts *intent* on harming you that drops onto the earth out of the darkness.

(3) These locusts were given the ability to torment people with a scorpion-like sting for five months, which I take to mean that, unlike a scorpion sting, the pain of their sting would not subside in a few hours or a day. This need not mean the people actually experienced the pain for five months before the judgment concluded. It is a way of saying that this was a more intense sting, that the pain was worse in duration than that of any scorpion sting. It was so horrific, especially given the likelihood of multiple stings, that there will be people who long to die but will not be able to do so.

(4) In unleashing these demonic forces on his enemies, in ceasing to restrain their drive to torment mankind, God turns back on his enemies the very forces and powers they had chosen to serve over him. He has them see how the "gods" they chose to follow actually hate them, and in so doing adds to the pain of their judgment and the vindication of his glory.

d. The appearance of the demonic locusts adds to the nightmare.

(1) They are like horses prepared for battle. Joel 2:4 refers to locusts as having the appearance of horses as does an Arabian proverb. The similarity is apparently in the head shape. It is possible this indicates abnormally large size. They were equipped and ready to do battle.

(2) They wore something like crowns of gold, which perhaps symbolizes their victorious mission of inflicting punishment.

(3) Their faces were like human faces. This would be very frightening on an insect-like creature. It indicates the intelligent cunning of these forces.

(4) They had hair like women's hair. This may be an allusion to the military prowess of the Parthians whose warriors rode into battle with long hair. Or perhaps the incongruous combination of femininity and devastation is meant to make the scene more disturbing.

(5) They had teeth like lions' teeth, which symbolizes their ferocity and destructiveness.

(6) They had breastplates like breastplates of iron. This symbolizes their lack of vulnerability.

(7) Their tails were equipped with five-month scorpion stings. This was the means by which they tormented the unsealed.

e. They were so numerous that in flight they sounded like an army of horses and chariots rushing into battle. Their king was the angel of the Abyss, named Destruction or Destroyer. This makes this demonic horde even more terrifying because they are not a leaderless rabble.

f. John announces that only the first of the woes announced by the eagle has passed; two remain. Granted that all this is apocalyptic symbolism and not a description of literal events – it is more like art, something designed to make an emotional impact – but the message this symbolic imagery is designed to convey is unmistakable. Being on the wrong side of God's judgment will be the most horrible thing you can imagine. It will be, as we might put it, your worst nightmare. And the picture of that judgment is not finished.

4. Sixth trumpet (second woe) - fiendish cavalry (9:13-21)

a. The sixth angel blew his trumpet, and John heard a voice from the golden altar tell the sixth angel to release the four angels who are bound at the Euphrates. The fact the voice is from the altar at which the prayers of the saints were presented to God (8:3-4) may reiterate the connection between those prayers and God's action.

b. The fact the four angels have been *bound* suggests they are evil beings rather than good angels who voluntarily do God's will. They were turned loose at the very hour decreed by God to kill a third of mankind. Their location at the Euphrates further suggests their hostility. Israel's arch enemies came from this region (Assyrians and Babylonians), and Rome's greatest threat, the Parthians, was from this region.

c. The four angels appear to be in charge of the limitless horde (symbolized in the number 200,000,000) of demonic horsemen who ride across the world spreading death and terror. The specter of a huge hostile cavalry had always been a source of terror for Jewish people and no doubt for all people of that time.

d. Regarding the appearance of this fiendish cavalry, John notes specifically that all of this was seen in his *vision*. This is a reminder that there is a strong symbolic element in what he is saying.

(1) They, meaning either the riders or both the riders and the horses, wore breastplates of fiery red, dark blue, and yellow, perhaps corresponding to the fire, sulfurous smoke, and sulfur coming out of the mouths of the horses.

(2) The horses had heads like lions, which symbolizes ferocity and destructiveness.

(3) Fire, smoke, and sulfur came out of the horses' mouths. This probably indicates the demonic origin of these creatures (e.g., Leviathan in Job 41:19-20 breathing smoke and fire; see also, Rev. 9:2, 19:20, 21:8). The fire, smoke, and sulfur are called plagues and are the means by which one third of mankind is killed. The first woe brought torment; the second woe brings death.

(4) The tails of the horses are like serpents, having heads with which they inflict injury. This is perhaps another way of suggesting the demonic origin of these creatures, as snakes and demons were closely associated (e.g., Rev. 12:9).

e. Osborne comments (p. 383), "Here this judgment is sent from God via the demonic hordes that have become his instrument of judgment, and there is great irony in the demonic forces breathing out the same 'fire, smoke, and sulfur' that will become their own eternal torment (19:20; 20:10)."

f. The targets of this punishment, the enemies of God, who survived these plagues, do not repent of their sins.

(1) They do not repent of idolatry, which is ultimately demon worship (Deut. 32:17; 1 Cor. 10:20), and thus continue to worship the very forces bringing about their destruction. Nor do they repent of their murders, magic arts (sorcery, witchcraft, and the use of magic potions often linked with demon worship), sexual sin, and thefts, which are involved with or naturally flow from idolatry.

(2) When this judgment falls, there ultimately will be submission by God's enemies but there will be no turning to him in saving repentance. As with the judgment on the Egyptians, the final judgment will harden God's enemies in their sin. That is part of the judgment; the time for repentance is over. I agree with Gregory Beale (p. 517) that the plagues "were not intended to have a redeeming effect

but a damning effect." The message for saints being pressured to accept the idolatry of Emperor worship is obvious.

C. Little scroll and two witnesses (10:1 - 11:14) - Just as there was an interlude when we were primed for the report of the opening of the seventh and final seal, now there is an interlude as we are primed for the report of the sounding of the seventh and final trumpet, the promised third woe.

1. John sees another mighty angel descend from heaven (10:1-7).

a. The phrases by which the angel is described (wrapped in a cloud, rainbow over his head, face like the sun, and legs like fiery pillars) are elsewhere connected with God (4:3) or Christ (1:13-16), so this angel is very important, but he is not Christ. Christ is never called an angel in this book, let alone simply "another angel," and this angel is nowhere given divine honors (e.g., worship).

b. A little scroll lies open in his hand, and he puts his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land. His gigantic size is another means of portraying his power and significance.

c. In response to his tremendous shout, "the seven thunders" sound and John is about to write down what they said, since he was told to write down the contents of the visions (1:11, 19), but a voice from heaven (Jesus or God) tells him not to do so. My guess, which is about all anyone has regarding the meaning of this text, is that God is symbolizing through the restriction on revealing what the seven thunders said that some aspects of the final judgment will remain unknown until experienced. Perhaps this is designed to remind readers that God is in control and they do not need to know all the details of the end. The broad contours given by the visions are sufficient for God's purpose.

d. The angel raises his right hand and swears there will be no more delay. The sounding of the seventh trumpet will fulfill the mystery of God in that the final judgment will be completed and that which God purposed in creation and made possible through the blood of the Lamb (5:9-10) will be brought to its fulfillment. As 11:15-18 demonstrate, the consummation of God's plan accompanies the sounding of the seventh trumpet, which brings the final woe (8:13, 11:14), the completion of his judgment.

e. As we will see, the final woe that comes with the sounding of the seventh trumpet gets presented and elaborated on through a series of visions involving the pouring out of seven bowls of wrath. So the seventh seal contains the seven trumpets in that the breaking of that seal reveals the contents of the scroll with its trumpet judgments, and the seventh trumpet contains the seven bowls of wrath in that the final woe that accompanies the seventh trumpet is portrayed through the judgments of the seven bowls.

2. The little scroll (10:8-11)

a. John is commanded by a heavenly voice to take the scroll that is open in the hand of the mighty angel. John asks the angel for the scroll and is told by him to take it and eat it. This is reminiscent of Ezek. 3:1-3.

b. The angel says the scroll will turn John's stomach sour but will be sweet in his mouth, and this is precisely what happens. The joy of being God's prophet and announcing the fulfillment of his eternal purposes, which includes the ultimate triumph of his people, is tempered by the difficult message he must deliver regarding the destiny of the church in the last days of fierce satanic opposition. It is a story of delivery *through* martyrdom and death, not delivery *from* it.

c. The basic message of the little scroll is revealed in the symbolism of 11:1-13. Before the vindicating judgment of God, when the saints will receive their ultimate reward, the church will face fierce satanic opposition (see, e.g., 13:7). The birth pains will become extreme.

d. John is encouraged to go on with his call to prophesy. There is more he must tell involving God's purpose for all people, Christian and foe alike. He needs such encouragement because the little scroll has revealed the ferocity of opposition to God's prophets.

3. The measuring of the temple (11:1-2)

a. John is given a measuring rod and told to measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there.

(1) With many commentators, I think these are various representations of the church. The church is elsewhere called the temple (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21; see also, 1 Pet. 2:4-5). The altar represents Christian service, an indirect reference to Christians, and the worshippers are the people of God.

(2) Measuring these representations of the church is a symbolic way of declaring its preservation. What is measured at God's command is a focus of his intense interest, which interest in this case is to protect and preserve. The spiritual destiny of the faithful is secure. They may die physically in the persecution symbolized in v. 2, but nothing can bar their entrance into the heavenly kingdom. So whereas the sealing in 7:1-8 marked the saints for exemption from God's judgment, the measuring here signifies God's protection of his servants *through* whatever they may be called to endure at the hands of their persecutors.

b. The outer court of the temple complex is *not* to be measured.

(1) I think this is the church viewed from a different perspective. It indicates that the church will not be protected from physical suffering and

death during the time of intense persecution right before the end, when the pagan nations will be allowed to trample the "holy city," those set apart by God, for 42 months. The faithful saints will be left vulnerable and unprotected in that sense, while being invulnerable in terms of their ultimate destiny and victory.

(2) Osborne states (p. 412): "[T]he 'outer court' like the sanctuary must symbolize the saints who are persecuted. In all three temples – Solomon's, Ezekiel's, and Herod's – the sanctuary, inner court, and outer court were sacred ground and belonged to God. Thus, in this section the outer court would mean that the church is handed over to the Gentiles/nations for a time."

(3) The time of 42 months referred primarily to the period of intense Jewish suffering under Antiochus Epiphanes (167-164 B.C., but he died in 163). Stemming from Daniel, it became a conventional symbol for a limited period of time in which evil would be allowed broad reign, in which God's people would be persecuted and oppressed. That time is expressed in various ways in 11:3, 12:6, 12:14, and 13:5.

4. The two witnesses (11:3-13)

a. During this period of intense persecution (1,260 days = 42 months = times, times, and half a time [3 1/2 years]; note also "And" at the beginning of v. 3), two witnesses are given strength to prophesy, and thus they are called two prophets in v. 10. They wear sackcloth, which indicates sorrow. In this case there was sorrow over the reign of wickedness. They call a world entrenched in evil to repentance in the name of Christ.

b. These witnesses symbolize that part of the church that is specially called to bear prophetic witness to Christ in the last days before the end. There are several indications that they represent a group larger than just two individuals.

(1) They are described as two *lampstands* (v. 4), an image John used in chapters 1 and 2 for local congregations comprised of many individuals.

(2) It is said that the beast will "make war" on them (v. 7), which is strange terminology if they are only two individuals.

(3) The fact the "inhabitants of the earth," God's opponents throughout the world, were tormented by their preaching and rejoiced at their deaths would imply to the original audience, a first-century audience that had no mass communication, that these witnesses had a broader impact than could reasonably be attributed to two individuals. So the picture would imply to that audience, especially given the symbolic nature of apocalyptic, that the two witnesses represented a group of individuals.

c. The witnesses are identified as "the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth."

(1) Similar imagery exists in Zechariah 4. Two olive trees, representing Joshua (the high priest) and Zerubbabel (the Jewish governor under the Persian king Darius), are depicted standing next to a golden lampstand (which now becomes two) that supports a bowl with seven lamps (the eyes of the Lord) burning on the perimeter. The portrayal of these witnesses as olive trees and lampstands indicates they are Spirit-filled, royal and priestly servants of God who bear witness on his behalf.

(2) The number two may be due to the fact two witnesses were required for valid legal testimony (e.g., Num. 35:30; Dt. 19:15; Mat. 18:16; Lk. 10:1-24). It also suggests that only part of the church is meant. The totality would be represented by the number seven (see, e.g., Rev. 1:12). All are to serve Christ faithfully in every circumstance but some will serve in a distinctive prophetic capacity that will expose them to martyrdom more than others.

d. They are supernaturally protected for the period of their prophetic activity. This is symbolized by fire flowing from their mouths and consuming their foes (see, 2 Ki. 1:10-12 - fire from heaven consuming Elijah's enemies).

e. They also have power to shut the heavens during the time of their prophesying (3 1/2 years), to turn the waters to blood, and to strike the earth with plagues. This is a clear allusion to the ministries of Elijah (1 Ki. 17:1; Lk. 4:25; Jas. 5:17) and Moses (Ex. 7:17-21). This may be a way of symbolizing preaching that is done in the power and spirit of Elijah and Moses, just as John the Baptist ministered in the spirit and power of Elijah (Lk. 1:17; Mat. 11:14). Note that John never performed a miracle (Jn. 10:41).

f. When their ministry has fulfilled God's purposes, which involved tormenting (convicting) the inhabitants of the earth, they are no longer protected from physical harm. In the last days, the beast from the Abyss kills the prophetic element of the church, its preachers, teachers, and leaders. John expects his readers to recognize this beast as the Antichrist, about whom he will have more to say. With this, the full number of martyrs is completed (see, 6:11). So heavy is the blow that the church is thought by its enemies to be vanquished, to be as good as dead.

g. For 3 1/2 days their corpses lie in the street of the "great city" while the inhabitants of the earth celebrate wildly.

(1) The refusal to bury the witnesses refers to continued humiliation and scorn of the decimated church by the inhabitants of the earth.

(2) The "great city" in which they are killed and left in the street is not a specific city, as the witnesses represent the prophetic element of the church throughout the world, but represents any city opposed to God and the witness of his

servants. It is the transhistorical city of Satan. In Morris's words, "The 'great city' is every city and no city."

(a) The "great city" elsewhere in Revelation refers to the heart of Antichrist's empire, which is called "Babylon" (16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21; see also, 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2) because Babylon was an ancient enemy of God's people. It is pictured as an end-time Rome because Rome was the embodiment in John's day of organized, satanic opposition to God through its hostility toward the church.

(b) This city is "spiritually called," i.e., in the language of prophesy or by those with spiritual understanding, Sodom and Egypt. These two places were proverbial for godlessness and oppression, and both felt the judgment of God.

(c) This city is also where Jesus was crucified. Jerusalem was but another manifestation of organized opposition to God.

h. After 3 1/2 days (a relatively short time), the Lord will return. The church, including these martyrs, will rise to meet the Lord in the air (see, 1 Thess. 4:15-17). This will be a time of terror for the enemies of God as the final judgment, the time of God's vengeance and punishment, begins. The earthquake symbolizes the arrival of that judgment.

i. In keeping with the symbolism of the final judgment from the trumpet blasts, the final judgment is portrayed as a progressive devastation directed at God's enemies. Perhaps the progression is designed to add to the portrait of horror by enhancing the psychological element – with each wave that hits the hope that the fury was over with the last wave is dashed. Here it begins with 7,000 people being killed in the great earthquake. The faithful have been removed, which comports with the protection earlier symbolized by their being sealed.

j. Those who are not killed are terrified by this outpouring of God's wrath. Though many believe the phrase "and gave glory to the God of heaven" indicates they repented of their sin and converted to Christ, I think Beale is correct in stating (p. 607), "any conversion, whether of Jews or of Gentiles, must be ruled out, since it would have to be placed *after* the commencement of the last judgment, which is signaled in v. 13a."

(1) In other words, they glorified God not by surrendering to him but by being terrorized by the earthquake, which was a tribute to its power, and by recognizing God as the one who caused it. It is a forced acknowledgment of the power and sovereignty of God.

(2) Quoting Kiddle, Mounce (p. 229) states, "They give glory to God 'when they are compelled by overriding terror to recognize that the true

Lord is Christ and not Antichrist" (see also, Hughes, Kistemaker, and Wilcock). This fits with the lack of repentance of those undergoing the judgment in 9:20-21.

5. Announcement of the woes (11:14) – Having previewed in this interlude the destiny of the church in the final hour, John now reorients the reader with a reminder that only two of the announced woes have passed. He says "the second woe has passed," which was the demonic cavalry reported in 9:13-21, and then declares that "the third woe comes without delay." This is followed immediately by the seventh trumpet, the third woe according to 8:13.

D. Seventh trumpet - the "end" (11:15-19)

1. With the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the vision surprisingly jumps to the end state, the consummated kingdom of God, which presupposes the completion of the outpouring of God's holy wrath in judgment. In other words, the horrible third woe that accompanies the sounding of the seventh and final trumpet, the completion of the portrait of God's terrible judgment, is not reported. Instead one is taken to the eternal state that will exist when that judgment is complete.

2. This is apparent from the fact the loud voices in heaven are saying (v. 15), "The kingdom of the world *has become* the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." And the 24 elders, on their faces before God, worship him saying (vv. 17-18), "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, *who is and who was* [note the absence of "and who is to come" from 1:4, 1:8, and 4:8], for you *have taken* your great power and *begun* to reign.¹⁸ The nations raged, but your wrath *came*, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth." It is a worshipful look from the perspective of the consummation back at what God had done in bringing that about; it is a view from the eternal state, *after* the completion of God's wrath and the judgment of the dead.

3. As I explained in the introduction to the class, the O. T. ends on a note of unfulfilled hope. It was clear that in one sense God always had ruled the world from the time of creation. He was on his heavenly throne (e.g., Ps. 11:4; Isa. 6:1) and reigned over all (e.g., 1 Chron. 16:31; Ps. 93:1, 96:10). But there was some sense in which his kingly rule was not being fully expressed. He was allowing creation to go on out of step with his ultimate intention for it, to continue in a state of sin and suffering that was contrary to his ultimate purpose and vision.

4. But the prophets saw that a day was coming in which God would express his rulership of creation in such a way that all things would be brought into harmony and conformity with his ultimate will and purpose. His creation would be redeemed from the dreadful consequences of sin that had invaded it. This world of rebellion, sin, hostility, and fragmentation would be rescued by God, transformed by him into a true utopia, a perfect reality of love, joy, and fellowship with God and one another.

On that day God would express his authority over creation in a way he was not doing at present; he would in his sovereign power bring his creation to its ultimate fulfillment. At that time, he *will be* king over all the earth (Zech. 14:9) in a manner unlike the present.

5. Jesus inaugurated that kingdom, that fullest expression of God's rulership, but taught that it would not be consummated or finalized – expressed in its most complete form – until he returned. At that time, all bad things, things like sin, suffering, death, mourning, crying, and pain, will be removed; the creation made sick by sin will at last be healed. Christians will live forever in glorified bodies in a transformed creation, a "heavenized" creation, known as the new heavens and new earth.

6. This is the time to which the heavenly beings are referring in saying "The kingdom of the world *has become* the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" and in saying the Lord God Almighty "has *begun* to reign." They are referring to the consummation of the kingdom which follows the return of Christ and the final outpouring of God's wrath; they are announcing the fulfillment or establishment of that to which Peter referred in Acts 3:21.

7. Verse 19b symbolizes God's coming in judgment, so it is an indication that we are going to take a step back and see the completion of God's wrath that is implicit in the vision of the final state given in vv. 15-18. It creates an expectation that the third woe, the terrible judgment associated with the seventh trumpet, will be reported. But as we begin chapter 12, our expectations once again go unmet. The third woe will not be depicted until chapter 15, and then it will be portrayed as the outpouring of seven bowls of wrath. That final woe of the final trumpet gets developed and magnified through the imagery of the seven bowls of wrath.

8. But before that picture, we are given in chapters 12-14 a spiritual summary of history from the coming of Christ until the end. Having represented the final state and then backed up to the brink of the final woe, the completion of God's wrath, John is made to pause to reveal the spiritual forces at work in this struggle that is played out on earth.

9. The ark of the covenant that John is allowed to see in God's heavenly temple in v. 19a is a symbol of God's love and faithfulness. It is shown in conjunction with the symbolism of God completing his judgment, the indication of the coming third woe, to reinforce that God will fulfill his promises and reward the faithful and to provide further assurance for the saints in the coming days of wrath.