

The Seven Trumpets

Pop quiz time! We're going to start tonight with a review, because, as we go through Revelation, I want you to be able to see the big picture. I want you to understand the flow of the book, to see it as more than just a bunch of disjointed visions, and to see how it all ties together.

Question 1: We talked last time about how something called recapitulation is occurring in the book of Revelation. What is recapitulation?

-The same story is being told over and over again, from a different perspective each time, with a different emphasis, and using different imagery to convey the story.

Question 2: In general terms, without being too specific, what is the overall story that's being retold throughout Revelation?

-It's the story of God's plan for human history, from the time of Christ's ascension to His second coming. It's telling us what we can expect life to be like on earth as we await the return of Christ. We can expect trouble, persecution and tribulation. The story also tells about what His actual return will be like, and it tells us what it will be like after He returns when we finally get to be with Him in heaven. So, there are three elements to this story: life on earth, Christ's return, and life in heaven.

Question 3: We've talked about how Revelation can be divided into seven sets of seven, or seven visions. Each of those visions tells this same story. How do the letters to the churches tell this story?

-In the letters to the churches, we have the story from a human perspective. We see actual examples of people enduring persecution and tribulation. That's the reality of life on earth. We also have a glimpse of Christ's return, as He promises to judge those who will not repent. Then there's the promises made to those who overcome or conquer, which gives us a glimpse of what heaven will be like.

Question 4: How does the vision of the scroll and the seven seals tell this story?

-The first four seals describe life on earth, with war, famine, bloodshed, and death. The fifth seal shows the martyrs crying out for justice, which comes in the sixth seal. There we see the devastation caused to the earth as Christ returns. The old creation is being destroyed to make way for the new. We also have a beautiful picture of what life in heaven will be like as we join with the multitude of other believers to praise God and the Lamb.

Question 5: Remember last time when we discussed the sixth seal, we saw the destruction of the earth, and we saw the people trying to hide. Those people asked a very important question. What question did they ask?

-They asked, "Who can stand the wrath of the Lamb?" We saw that question answered when we saw the 144,000 that were sealed by God through the blood of the Lamb. They were sealed for protection from the coming judgment. So those sealed with the blood of the Lamb will not have to face the wrath of the Lamb. To me that's the main point of the book of Revelation, and we'll discuss that more in depth in tonight's lesson.

What about those who are not sealed? We saw what happens for those who are sealed, but we left the "unsealed" cowering in the mountains trying to hide from God's wrath. What happens to those people?

That's what the vision of the seven trumpets is about. The opening of the seven seals reveals the protection of those that are sealed. It was a vision of hope and comfort. However, the blowing of the seven trumpets is meant to be a warning for those who are not sealed. So, we see here the different emphasis being made in each of these sections.

We said that with recapitulation, the same story is told from a different perspective each time. With the seven churches, it was from the perspective of standing on earth looking around at what's happening to those in the church, the believers. With the seven seals, it was like we were standing on earth looking up into heaven. We saw the spiritual reality behind the judgment, and the protection of the saints from that judgment. With the seven trumpets, it's like we're standing in heaven looking down on earth to see what's happening to the unsealed during these judgments.

Preparing to Blow the Trumpets (8:2-5)

So, let's take a look at these seven trumpets.

We ended our last study with the seventh seal being opened in Revelation 8:1. We're not told what that seal revealed, but we know that it was so amazing that it rendered everything in heaven speechless for about half an hour.

In Revelation 8:2, John writes, "Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them." Remember when John says, "Then I saw," it does not mean that the coming events happened after the events of the previous chapters. It's just the next thing that he saw in his vision. However, this is the start of a new vision and the story is starting over.

So, these angels are given trumpets to blow. This is very significant. It should cause our minds to instantly go back to the Old Testament to another story where trumpets preceded judgment.

What story does this call to mind?

The story of Joshua and the Battle of Jericho, right? Would someone briefly tell us that story?

They marched around the city seven days. On the seventh day, they marched seven times blowing trumpets. On the seventh time, when the trumpets blew the walls fell down. The blowing of the trumpets there served to warn those in Jericho of the impending judgment as well

as announce the arrival of that judgment. That's exactly what we see in Revelation. The trumpets blown by these angels are meant to warn people of God's wrath that's coming.

Before the trumpets are blown, we see an angel holding a censer, which is a vessel for burning incense. Mixed in with the incense are the prayers of the saints (v. 3-4). That should bring to mind what we read last time about the fifth seal, in Revelation 6:9-10, where the souls of those who had been martyred are crying out, "How long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" See, they're calling for judgment on those on the earth, the unsealed. Now, in the vision of the trumpets, those prayers, those cries are brought before God as an offering, an offering that's accepted by Him. Then we see the answer their cries in 8:5, where "the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake."

Isn't this an awesome picture of the effectiveness of our prayers? We may sometimes feel like our prayers get no higher than the ceiling. We may feel like they really don't accomplish much. But they do! Our prayers are being heard and accepted by God, and they are effective. I can't fully wrap my mind around how that works, but it's enough to know that it does. It's enough to know that God does hear us when we cry out to Him. It's like God tell Moses in Exodus 3:7-8:

Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey."

He says, "I've seen their affliction, I've heard their cries, I know their suffering, and I have come to deliver them." I love that! You know, the story of the Exodus is a direct foreshadowing of our experience as slaves to sin and what Christ has done to free us. We see that even in Revelation, especially in what's about to come, as the trumpets unleash plagues similar to those that God sent upon Egypt.

The First Four Trumpets (8:6-12)

What are the plagues or judgments unleashed by the blowing of the trumpets? Before we look at them, I will say, I had a hard time finding a clear consensus among the authors I read. This is a challenging section, and there was some variety of opinion as to what the trumpets mean. However, all of the authors group the first four trumpets together, just as the first four seals were grouped together. They also all seem to agree that these first four trumpets show what those who are unsealed will experience as they live out their lives on earth in the time between Christ's ascension and second coming.

Overview

Let's look briefly at the first four trumpets, then we'll discuss what they actually mean:

1. The first angel blew his trumpet, and there was hail and fire, mixed with blood, destroying a third of the earth and the trees and all of the grass. *What Egyptian plague*

does this call to mind? This mimics the 7th Egyptian plague, where a horrendous hailstorm with fire killed all the people and animals that were exposed, as well as all the plants (Exodus 9:13-26).

2. The second angel blew his trumpet, and a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea. The sea became blood and a third of the sea creatures died. A third of the ships were also destroyed. *What Egyptian plague does this remind you of?* This refers back to the 1st Egyptian plague where all the water throughout the land became blood (Exodus 7:14-25)
3. The third angel blew his trumpet, and a star fell from heaven into a third of the rivers and springs of water. The water became bitter and people died. This is actually not an allusion to an Egyptian plague, but to Jeremiah 9:15 and 23:15, where God judges disobedient people by giving them poisoned water to drink.
4. The fourth angel blew his trumpet and a third of the sun, moon, and stars were struck so a third of their light was darkened. *What Egyptian plague does this call to mind?* This is similar to the 9th Egyptian plague, where it was pitch dark for three days (Exodus 10:21-23).

God's Judgment through Nature

According to Derek Thomas, these four trumpets represent the suffering of the created order, or nature itself.¹ We see in Romans 8 that even creation is in bondage, awaiting One to come and set it free (v.19-22). Thomas writes, "Whatever the symbolic allusions may be, the main focus is on the judgment that creation itself experiences. Something has gone radically wrong with the created order." Taken at face value, the emphasis in these first four trumpets does seem to be focused on nature. Land, water, and sky are all affected by these judgments. Trees and grass burn up, the sea becomes blood, the rivers become bitter, and the sky becomes dark. We do see nature being affected, so I think, in part, we can consider the natural disasters that we face as part of God's judgment. I think God allows these things, or causes them, to remind us of His power over the elements of nature as well as warn people in a small way of the coming judgment.

I remember when Hurricane Katrina hit several years ago. I was in college in northern Mississippi, but it was still a category 1 hurricane when it got to where I was. That storm caused a lot of devastation. I remember people saying, "What if the storm was God's judgment on the people in New Orleans and along the coast?" New Orleans is known for being a cesspool of wickedness, and the Mississippi coast was littered with casinos. I think we need to be cautious in making those kinds of statements, but I do think that there is evidence to support God using natural disasters to judge people.

What do you think? Do you think natural disasters can be seen as God's judgment?

¹Thomas, Derek. *Let's Study Revelation*, 74.

This idea of using nature to judge, that's really what the Egyptian plagues were about. God used natural things in the judgment against the Egyptians, but He ramped up the power and the magnitude and the devastation caused by these things. Frogs are natural, but millions of frogs are not natural. Gnats are natural, unfortunately, but millions of gnats are not natural. Hail is natural, as some of us witnessed a couple nights ago, but hail mixed with fire that kills any exposed living thing, that's not natural.

Each plague was directed toward a specific Egyptian deity. Each time, God challenged one of the false gods, and of course He won. He showed His sovereignty and power and superiority, that He was the only true God. So, when we see these powerful natural events, like the hailstorm from a couple nights ago, it should serve as a reminder of the powerful, awesome God that we serve. It should also be a warning to those that are not saved, of the power and might of God.

So, the first four trumpets could represent God's judgment of nature and of man through nature. I think that's a valid interpretation. However, considering the symbolic nature of Revelation, there's likely an underlying symbolism that we need to explore, which is the direction that Nancy Guthrie goes. She writes the following:

If we take the first four trumpets as a whole, they each seem to picture the impact of ongoing but not yet final judgment on the things in this world in which many people find their sustenance and security. There are not necessarily bad things. But they are vulnerable things. The trumpets are sounding an alarm, warning of the danger of having only this world and what it provides and promises to depend on for security and satisfaction.²

Look to God for Provision

So, with the first trumpet, we see a third of the trees and fields burning up. *What would happen if the trees and field burned up?* We get food from trees and fields, so if they burn up it would result in a famine. The fire is figurative, symbolizing the stripping away of those things that people tend to depend on rather than God. People depend on the earth and nature to provide the food that they need, but they don't realize that God is actually in control over those things. So, we should be dependent on Him for our daily provision rather than trusting in the earth to provide.

Look to God for Security

With the second trumpet, we see a mountain being thrown into the sea. Mountains in Scripture often symbolize kingdoms. So, with this trumpet, we see the kingdoms or governments of the world being overthrown. *What would be the result of our government failing or being overthrown?* This would result in economic distress. The people of John's day were dependent on fishing and trading. If the fish and the ships are destroyed, then their livelihoods are destroyed. In addition to the famine of the previous trumpet, this would cause poverty and scarcity of other resources. So, people tend to trust in the government and economic system to

²Guthrie, Nancy. *Blessed: Experiencing the Promise of the Book of Revelation*, 126.

sustain them, but God is showing that those things are not secure. Instead, our security should come from God alone.

Look to God for Satisfaction

With the third trumpet, a star falls from heaven. This is an allusion to Isaiah 14:12-15, where the guardian angel of Babylon is cast down into a pit. Elsewhere in Revelation, the star also refers to an angelic being that's representative of an earthly person or kingdom.³ So, the judgment against this angel is representative of judgment against evil mankind.

The reference to wormwood, which is an herb that can be used as a poison, is an allusion to Jeremiah 9:15 and 23:15, where God punished the Israelites by giving them bitter or poisoned water to drink. However, the bitter water is symbolic. Nancy Guthrie sees it as representative of the things that we consume that we think will satisfy us, yet we find that they turn bitter in the end, as we see from this quote:

This trumpet demonstrates that the very things in this world that people consume, expecting them to be life-giving, often ends up poisoning them. It trumpets to those who think that their sins add to their lives, that sin ruins everything. In fact, it will be their ruin.⁴

What are some things that people seek satisfaction in, but actually result in ruin?

So, instead of looking to the pleasures and pursuits of this world for satisfaction, we should realize that God alone can give us true satisfaction.

Look to God for Wisdom

With the fourth trumpet, we see this darkness that comes upon the earth. It's suggested by Greg Beale that this darkness refers to spiritual, mental, or cultural darkness. He says that it could refer to the despair that comes over people when they realize the futility of their sin and the judgment that awaits.⁵ Nancy Guthrie agrees that it's a spiritual or mental darkness, but she says it represents the failure of the world's wisdom and spirituality to truly enlighten people.⁶

How does the world's wisdom or the world's spirituality actually lead to darkness rather than light?

The world's wisdom and the world's religion actually lead to further darkness because they lead away from God. We read in Proverbs 9:10 that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. So, rather than trusting in the world's wisdom, we must seek God's wisdom as found in His world.

³Beale, Greg. *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary*, 175.

⁴Guthrie, 129.

⁵Beale, 176.

⁶Guthrie, 127.

So, these first four trumpets are a warning those who are not sealed that they can't find what they need by looking to the world. They seek provision in nature, they seek security in governments, they seek satisfaction in sinful or worldly pursuits, and they seek wisdom in the world's idea of spirituality. However, they will never find what they seek until they turn to God.

The Fifth Trumpet (8:13-9:12)

So, after the fourth trumpet, there's a shift before the next trumpet. An eagle flies over crying, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!" The first four judgments were bad, but it sounds like things are about to get worse. With the first four trumpets, we see the result of people's own sinfulness and bad decisions. However, we're about to see them actually come under spiritual attack.

With the blowing of this trumpet, another star falls from heaven, only this star represents Satan himself. He's given a key to a bottomless pit, which is hell. From this pit billows smoke that darkens the sun and the air (9:2). William Hendrickson identifies the smoke as "the smoke of deception and delusion, of sin and sorrow, or moral darkness and degradation that is constantly belching up out of hell."⁷

From this pit comes a swarm of locusts who are given permission to torment those who do not have God's seal (v.3-4). This is another allusion to the Egyptian plagues, specifically to plague number eight, which was locusts (Exodus 10:1-20). These locusts in Revelation, though, actually symbolize demons. Notice that Satan was given the key to hell, and the demons are given permission to torment people, but only to a certain extent.

What's the significance of that?

This shows that God is still in control. Satan and his demons can't do anything without God's permission. It also shows that Satan is an instrument by which God executes judgment on the earth.

A normal locust swarm only lasts a few days, but this demonic locust swarm will last for five months (v.5), or the entire life-span of a locust, showing that this judgment will be severe. In fact, the people will long for death, but it will not come (v.6).

To me, it's a bit frightening to think of swarms of demons roaming the earth tormenting people. In fact, George and I have watched a show about people who claim that their houses are haunted and they are being tormented by ghosts. They may be seeing or hearing things. Some of them are experiencing unexplained sickness or physical pain. Some have even been scratched by these "ghosts." I'm convinced that what they're really dealing with is demons. I don't believe that the spirits of dead people can haunt locations, but I think that these people are experiencing some of what we're reading about here in Revelation.

⁷Guthrie, 128.

It's interesting, because in one episode a woman had lived in her house for years and never had any problems. Then, her grown daughter moved in with her and was being tormented. When the host of the show asked the mom why she had not had any encounters with these "ghosts," she said that she was a follower of Christ and was protected.

Now, you may not believe in such things. But I'm convinced that demons are real and they can cause real harm to people, and this passage seems to support that. The good news is, as the mom said on that show, followers of Christ are protected. These demons can only torment those people who do not have God's seal on their forehead. That should be a relief!

Next, we see a description of these demons. Would someone read Revelation 9:7-10?

These demons are a bizarre mix of what's beautiful and what's scary. They wear crowns and have human faces with hair like a woman. That would come across as beautiful and appealing. However, they are prepared for battle, with lion's teeth and stingers like scorpions. Again, we read that they are able to torment people for five months.

How do these demons torment people? By deceiving them and luring them into sinful behavior. They make wickedness look appealing or even virtuous. But in the end, they sting, causing regret, sorrow, and torment, as Derek Thomas writes:

The book of Revelation is teaching us to see that the world in which men and women live is both beguiling and brutal at the same time. The brutality is often masked, but it is none the less vicious and ultimately devastating. The whole world is in the grip of the evil one.⁸

Nancy Guthrie agrees, as she writes, "The demons appear commanding, invulnerable, seductive, and cunning. But they sting and hurt and torment. The power to hurt is in their tails, in devastation left behind after the fun has been had."⁹ So, they lure people into sinful behavior, which traps them in guilt and shame.

We then see that these demons have over them a king called Abaddon or Apollyon (9:11). Abaddon is a Hebrew word, and Apollyon is Greek, but both words mean "destroyer." Quoting Nancy Guthrie again, "All who dwell on earth, who are not sealed by the true king, have a king who wants to destroy them."

The Sixth Trumpet (9:13-21)

Now we come to the sixth trumpet, which releases four angels who have been bound at the Euphrates River. The Euphrates River symbolically refers to the location where Satan gathers his forces against God. These angels are actually fallen angels or demons. They are leading these demonic troops on horseback. It says that the number of troops is "twice ten thousand times ten thousand." Mathematically that comes to two million, but the Greek literally

⁸Thomas, 77.

⁹Guthrie, 130.

translates “double myriad of myriads.” The Greek word *myrias*, or “ten thousand,” is used symbolically to mean an innumerable multitude.¹⁰ So John is trying to tell us that there’s a whole lot of them. From the horses’ mouths come fire and smoke and sulfur. Their aim is to kill a third of mankind and wound many others.

There are a couple different opinions as to what this trumpet actually means. Vern Poythress believes that this is referring to actual warfare. There was a common fear in this area in the first century that the Parthians would attack the Roman Empire from beyond the Euphrates River. So, Poythress sees this as judgment in the form of a military takeover, such as happened with both Judah and Israel in the Old Testament. They turned so far from God that He allowed enemy armies to overthrow them. Poythress writes, “Nations as well as individuals who give themselves to idols or the worship of power and conquest may find themselves overwhelmed in a military judgment.”¹¹

Nancy Guthrie believes that this is more symbolic, though. She sees the fire, smoke, and sulfur coming from the mouth to represent the false teaching that comes from the mouths of some people, in order to deceive. She writes, “The threat is in what they say, the false teaching that originates with them. John is using apocalyptic language to describe something we don’t always see as scary or troubling—deception and false teaching.”¹²

Is false teaching really such a dangerous thing? If so, why does the church not seem to recognize it as such?

I like how Nancy Guthrie explains it:

Many Christians view teaching that distorts who Jesus is, what he offers, and what he requires as simply a difference of opinion, interpretation, or approach. This picture, however, shows us that the deception of false teachers and the promotion of alternative gods aren’t merely human phenomena; they are actually empowered by demonic spirits. This apocalyptic imagery draws back the curtain of heaven so we can see false teaching and deception as God sees it so we will see the real danger in it. Deception leads to spiritual and physical death.¹³

Both the threat of enemy attack and the threat of false teaching were real for John’s first century audience, so both of these interpretations have merit. I tend toward the more symbolic approach, so I would see it as false teaching.

We’ve seen some awful stuff so far. This is the reality of God’s judgment against sin and those who reject Him. We’ve seen God taking away those things that people tend to depend on other than God Himself, those things in which they seek provision, security, satisfaction, and wisdom.

¹⁰Beale, 191.

¹¹Poythress, Vern. *The Returning King*, 124.

¹²Guthrie, 131.

¹³*Ibid.*, 131-132.

We've seen Him turn loose these demon swarms to tempt people and lure them into sin, and we saw the torment and devastation that results from that sin. We've also seen these demonic angels spreading false teaching and deceiving the people, leading to physical and spiritual death. This is a very grim picture. These trumpets are blaring this warning to people, "Repent!" But they don't repent.

Revelation 9:20-21 say that those not killed by these plagues did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshipping demons and idols...nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts. Nancy Guthrie summarizes it this way:

The trumpets have been blasting in the form of preliminary and partial judgments, warning them of the final judgment, but they love their lives and their lies, their hate and their evil and their sexual freedom and pursuit of wealth too much to turn toward Christ in repentance and faith.¹⁴

The Angel and the Scroll (10:1-11)

If you remember when we studied the seals, there was an interlude or a pause between seals six and seven. The same is true of the trumpets. After trumpet six is blown, then the image changes. It's like God knew that John would need some good news on the heels of all that heavy gloom and doom. I don't know about you, but I need that too. So now we get rainbows and clouds and a happier vision.

John sees and another angel, but this one is wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow on his head. His face is like the sun, and his legs are like pillars of fire (v.1). It's believed by some that this mighty angel is actually Jesus Himself.¹⁵ In the Old Testament, there are several occasions where a theophany occurred, which is where the preincarnate Christ appeared on earth in angelic form. One example is Genesis 16:7-13, when the angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar while she was out in the wilderness after fleeing from Sarai. After the angel gives her a message and a command, Hagar called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing" (v.13). She calls him Lord and God, which seems to indicate that he's more than just a mere angel. Many believe that any reference to the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament is actually referring to Christ. That seems to be in keeping with what we have in Revelation, although not everyone would agree with that.

I think it has merit, though. The description of the angel is similar to the description of Christ in Revelation 1. Also, the fact that he's standing with one foot in the sea and one foot on land would indicate authority over both land and sea, which a mere angel would not have. He speaks with a loud voice, like a lion, and we know Jesus is referred to as a lion. John also hears seven thunders when he speaks, which is reminiscent of the thunder emanating from the throne of God.

¹⁴Ibid., 133.

¹⁵Thomas, 83.

However, since the text refers to him as an angel, I will also refer to him that way, even though I think it is Jesus.

So, this angel is holding a scroll, which should immediately take your mind back to chapter 5, where God is seated on His throne holding a scroll. That scroll contained God's plans for human history, but we're not told what this scroll contains.

When the angel speaks, it sounds like seven thunders. John starts to write down what is said, but a voice from heaven says, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down." We're not told why John is not allowed to write it down. It's possible that it contains a part of history that God is just not ready to reveal yet, similar to the seventh seal. We read in Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." What is spoken could just be one of the secret things belonging to God, that He doesn't wish to reveal.

Either way, the angel declares that there will be no more delay. After the sounding of the six trumpets, nothing else has to happen before the seventh trumpet is blown and the Day of Judgment arrives. That's just another indication that we are living in the last days, as we've discussed before.

The angel also says that when the seventh trumpet is blown, the mysteries of God will be revealed as was announced to the prophets.

What do you think the mysteries of God are?

Remember, the book of Revelation is the unfolding or revealing of God's plans for history. With the seventh and final trumpet, the final mystery of His plan will be revealed. There will be nothing left hidden. The greatest mystery of God's plan has to do with salvation, as we read in Romans 16:25-26, where Paul writes that the mystery of God was kept secret for many ages, but was finally revealed through the writings of the prophets. It was ultimately fulfilled in Christ. Thomas writes, "What John is testifying to here is that the end of time will reveal to us what God is doing in this world, namely fulfilling his plan of redemption."¹⁶

Next, John is told to take the scroll from the angel and eat it. When he eats it, he discovers that it's sweet in his mouth but bitter in his stomach, just as he was told it would be. He was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings." This mimics the commissioning of Ezekiel who was also given a scroll to eat that was sweet in his mouth. However, Ezekiel was told that he would be proclaiming God's message to a people who would not listen (Ezekiel 2-3). We see that God's word is sweet to those who love him, but proclaiming it to an unbelieving world can be a bitter experience, as we see in next section.

¹⁶Thomas, 86.

The Two Witnesses (11:1-14)

After eating the scroll, John is given a measuring rod like a staff, and he is told to “measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there.” The temple is symbolic of the Church, or everyone who in Christ, that is still on earth. By measuring the temple, John is to count the worshippers, which is similar to the counting of the sealed in chapter 7. Again, this shows that God knows everyone that belongs to Him, and not a one will be lost. John is not to count those in the outer court, because that would correspond to the court of the Gentiles, which represents those who are outside of the temple or outside of Christ.

John is then told that the holy city will be trampled for forty-two months. The holy city is another reference to the Church. This shows that those outside the church will trample, or try to silence, those within. But they will only do this for forty-two months, which, as with all numbers in Revelation, is symbolic. It's expressed as 1260 days or 3 ½ years elsewhere. It just refers a time of persecution that's limited in length, and it signifies the period of time between the ascension and the second coming.

During this time, Christ will grant authority to two witnesses to prophesy (v.3). These are not two specific people. Rather they represent all of the people of God who will testify for Him even in the midst of persecution. The fact that there are two witnesses may be to fulfill the law that required two witnesses for someone to be convicted of a crime (Numbers 35:30). Jesus also called for two witnesses in the case of church discipline (Matthew 18:16). So, there are two witnesses to show the validity of their testimony.

The two olive trees and the two lampstands in verse 4 also refer to these witnesses, which alludes back to Zechariah 4:12-14. It implies that they are empowered by the Holy Spirit. We've already seen this imagery of lampstands, and we talked about the Spirit being the lamp on the lampstand that gives it light. That would make sense as we read what these men are capable of. Fire pours from their mouth to consume their foes (v.5). They can shut the sky so it doesn't rain, and they can strike the earth with plagues (v.6).

This sounds a lot like Elijah, who prayed for no rain and the rain held off, and Moses, who brought down plagues on Egypt. It shows from heaven's perspective the power that's behind our proclamation of the gospel. We may not realize how powerful the Word of God is, but it can do wonders. This is also symbolic. It shows the spiritual protection of God's people. The fire from their mouths is a symbol of God's judgment against those who would harm them.

In the same way, their ability to shut the sky and bring about plagues is also symbolic. It shows first that these witnesses have the same Spirit empowering them as Moses and Elijah had. The catastrophes or plagues that are mentioned also likely refer to the judgment of God. When we proclaim the gospel to people, it is a message of salvation for those who believe but it's a message of damnation and judgment for those who reject it.

Also, Moses and Elijah did nothing from their own strength or power. They were merely conduits of the power of God to pour out His judgment on the wicked people surrounding them.

So, we also are merely conduits for God's power. I don't think He will work physical miracles through us the way He did Moses and Elijah, but we don't know the spiritual impact of our testimony. God could be doing miracles through us that we just can't see.

What type of spiritual miracles do you think God can work through His people?

There comes a point when these witnesses have finished their testimony, and the beast from the pit rises up to kill them. The beast represents the state or government that is under the influence of Satan. We've seen throughout history governments trying to silence the witness of true believers. Some believers will be put to death for their witness, and evil people will rejoice. They will think that by killing the Christians, they've won.

The great city here is the opposite of the holy city mentioned in verse 2. The holy city is made up of God's chosen people, whereas this great city is made of those who dwell on earth, or those outside of Christ. These witnesses are a torment to these wicked people.

Why is that? Why do unbelievers hate Christians so much?

Unbelievers hate Christians because of our message. We are a torment to them because they live in darkness and can't stand the light.

However, death is not the end for these witnesses. After 3 ½ days, the breath of God enters them, they rise again and are called up into heaven. This is a picture of the resurrection. Satan and his evil demons and the governments under his control may be able to silence the testimony of the Christians for a time, but not forever. The dead in Christ will rise again.

Notice the description of this event. This doesn't sound like a secret rapture. Their enemies watch them rise again. There is an earthquake and part of the city falls, killing seven thousand people. Again, this is symbolic. Thomas describes it this way:

At the moment of Christ's return, death and destruction will occur in the godless city that is opposed to Christ's kingdom and his rule. The survivors will acknowledge his glory (11:13), though it is doubtful that this means that they will be converted. They will acknowledge God's glory, but it will be too late, for the seventh trumpet is about to sound (11:15).¹⁷

The Seventh Trumpet (11:15-19)

We have seen the first six trumpets of judgment and the woe that they brought up on the earth against those who are not sealed. We've seen this interlude where John was recommissioned to proclaim God's Word. We also saw the power of the Holy Spirit in those that witness for God. Then we saw that some would be martyred for their faith, but that they will rise again on the last day when Christ comes to call His people home.

¹⁷Thomas, 97.

Now, we're finally ready for the seventh trumpet, which reveals the Day of Judgment for the unsealed, but a day of reward for those sealed by the blood of Christ. We read in Revelation 11:15 the angel proclaiming, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." Anyone else hearing the song from Handel's Messiah in your head right now? These are familiar words, but think about what they're saying.

When God created the world, He was setting up for Himself a kingdom. In creating Adam and Eve, He was creating for Himself subjects that would love Him and glorify Him and serve Him. However, His subjects rebelled against His rule, although there have always been a few that remained loyal to their King. That allowed Satan to come and set up a counterfeit kingdom on earth. So, throughout history, there's been a battle between God's kingdom and Satan's kingdom, the kingdom of this earth.

Daniel prophesied about a time when "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44). Daniel was looking forward to a time when all the counterfeit kingdoms of the earth would be destroyed and God's kingdom would reign eternal.

When Jesus began His earthly ministry, He proclaimed the time prophesied about by Daniel was at hand, as we read in Mark 1:15, which says, "Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.'" With the coming of Christ, God's eternal kingdom was inaugurated, but it won't be fully consummated until the second coming of Christ. That's what this passage in Revelation is saying. Satan's counterfeit kingdom will come to an end, and the kingdom of God in all its fulness will finally be reestablished on earth. This time, the kingdom will be forever and ever.

At this proclamation, the twenty-four elders around God's throne fall on their faces and worship, proclaiming judgment for the nations, but reward for the saints who fear God's name. Then, God's temple in heaven was opened and the ark of the covenant was seen.

What do you know about the Old Testament temple and the ark of the covenant?

The ark of the covenant was kept in the innermost part of the temple, called the Holy of Holies. That's where God's presence would come down. No one was allowed to enter this area except the high priest once a year to offer a sacrifice. God's presence and His glory were concealed behind the veil leading into the Holy of Holies.

When we see this imagery in Revelation of the temple being opened and the ark of the covenant being seen, it shows that God's glory is now being fully revealed, and His people finally have access to His presence. He's not hidden behind a veil any longer. We saw that in part with the death of Christ, when the veil was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). Through Christ, we no longer need the priest to intercede for us. We now can come boldly before the throne of God to receive mercy and grace, as we read in Hebrews 4:16.

But we're still on earth and God is still in heaven, so our access to Him, while better than the Old Testament saints, is still limited. As Paul writes, "We know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away...For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then fact to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:9-10, 12). So, we look forward to the day when we can fall on our faces before God's throne and worship him with the great multitude of other believers, spending eternity in His presence.

At the end of Revelation 11, we see that with the opening of the temple comes flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail. This is a final reminder that, while the return of Christ will be joyous occasion for those sealed with His blood, for the unsealed, it will be frightening time of judgment.

This vision is of the trumpets can be a downer. It's full of judgment and woe. It's not nearly as encouraging and hopeful as the vision of the seals. However, as we read about the judgment that's coming to those outside of Christ, it should motivate us to share the gospel. These trumpets are intended to be a warning to the unsealed. We should also proclaim this warning...that judgment is coming. We should not want anyone to have to endure those judgments. We should tell people that there's a way to escape the judgment, but it's only through Christ.

We should also be encouraged by the two witnesses, knowing that the Spirit will empower us to share His word boldly even in the face of persecution. We're fortunate here in America, but Christians around the world are living out this reality. They are choosing to proclaim God's Word to a hostile land to a wicked people, knowing that it may cost them their lives. Their hope is found in the fact that death is not the end...it's only the beginning!

Finally, most importantly, we should all look forward to the day when the kingdom of this earth becomes the kingdom of our Lord and He will reign forever and ever.