

GOD WITH US
Part 12: THE APOCALYPSE

Message 2 – Revelation 4-11
Jesus’ 2nd “Triumphal Entry”

Introduction

In the opening scene of the book, John saw the glorified Lord walk among the lampstands, the 7 churches of Asia, evaluating their condition and sending them messages. Now the major section of the book opens with John being caught up into the throne-room of heaven where he will be given visions of the final events leading up to the 2nd coming of Christ. The entirety of chapters 4-22 deal with *future things* all involving divine judgment and *the wrath of the Lamb (6:17)* being felt upon earth. The time has come for those on earth to give an account for their rejection of the gracious offer of God’s love, demonstrated so clearly in the cross of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Overview of Revelation

<i>PAST</i>	<i>Ch.1</i>	<i>John’s Vision of Jesus</i>
<i>PRESENT</i>	<i>Chs.2-3</i>	<i>Letters to the Seven Churches</i>
<i>FUTURE</i>	<i>Chs.4-22</i>	<i>Heavenly Throne Room 4-5</i> <i>7 Seals-7 Trumpets-7 Bowls 6-16</i> <i>Fall of Babylon the Great 17-18</i> <i>The Return of Christ 19</i> <i>The Millenium 20</i> <i>New Heavens & New Earth 21-22</i>

The Heavenly Throne Room: 4-5

John is taken up into heaven where he sees God the Father seated on a throne in an atmosphere of worship. The vision and the words John heard are very similar to what Isaiah the prophet saw and heard some 800 years earlier (Isaiah 6:1-3). This scene sets the stage for what follows, as God prepares to judge the earth and install His King, Jesus, on His earthly throne.

“After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must

take place after these things.’ Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.’ And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ‘Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created’” (4:1-11).

The “24 elders” appear often in Revelation, always in scenes of worship (4:4,10; 5:8; 11:16; 19:4). They could symbolically represent the redeemed people of God as a whole (12 from the O.T. and 12 from the N.T.); but the more compelling view is that they are the heavenly counterpart to the 24 courses of O.T. priests who served in the earthly temple overseeing worship (1Chronicles 24:4,5; 25:9-31). What happened in the *earthly* sanctuary was a shadow of the reality in *heaven* (Hebrews 8:4,5; 9:23). The Spirit (the seven spirits of God) stands ready to do His work. He was with the Creator at the first creation (Genesis 1:2) and now He is with Him at the beginning of the re-creation of all things. The 4 living creatures seem to be angelic beings dedicated to worship (Isa.6:1-3). They unceasingly sing of the *holiness* of God, which is fitting in the context of Revelation because God’s judgment against sin flows from His holiness and justice.

John sees God the Father holding a book with 7 seals. The O.T. prophets were sometimes told to eat symbolic, God-given books (scrolls) prior to their prophesying, symbolizing God’s impartation of His words to the prophet. (See Rev.10:8-11 where John eats a book.)

John is saddened when he learns that no one is able to open the 7-sealed book – no one that is except for the “*the Lion of Judah*” (i.e., Messiah). When John turns to see the “lion” he sees a “*lamb standing there, with the appearance of having been slain.*” Tremendous worship ensues when the Lamb takes the book and prepares to unseal its contents . . . the events leading to the return of Christ and His rule on Earth.

“I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?’ And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it; and one of the elders said to me, ‘Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.’ And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.’ Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.’ And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, ‘To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.’ And the four living creatures kept saying, ‘Amen.’ And the elders fell down and worshiped” (5:1-14).

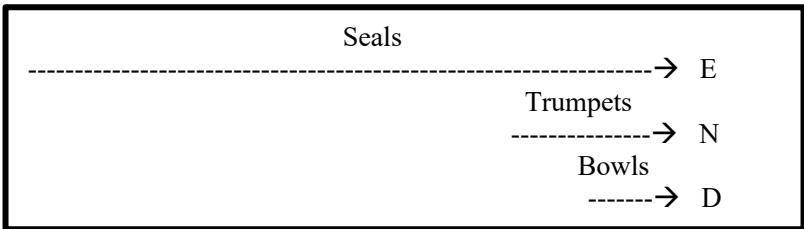
As the Lamb takes the book, worship explodes beyond the 24 elders and the 4 living creatures to include myriads upon myriads of angels in heaven along with every created thing in heaven, on earth, under the earth and in the sea. *All of creation* is involved in this worship song as the *heir of creation*, the Son of God, is preparing to claim what is His.

Why is the Lamb the only One worthy to open this book containing the final judgments of God upon humanity? Because He alone already took

the judgment of God upon Himself, thus sealing up this book and making it unnecessary for God to judge humanity. Now, because much of the created order has rejected God’s peace-offer, the book of judgments must be opened. How striking that when the judgments begin to flow, they are described as *“the wrath of the Lamb”* (6:16).

THE SEVEN SEALS: 6:1 – 8:1

The 7 seals will be followed by 7 trumpet judgments, then by 7 severe bowl judgments. The intensity of divine judgment increases with each sequence of 7. It seems that the 7th seal contains all 7 trumpet judgments, and the 7th trumpet introduces the 7 bowl judgments. Thus, there is amplification and intensification of the judgments as we near the end of the tribulation period.



The first 4 seals parallel what Jesus called *“the beginning of birth pangs”* (Matthew 24:4-14). The 6th seal presents familiar prophetic markers (cosmic signs in the skies) of the onset of the Day of the Lord.

Seal 1: The white horse: a powerful conquering king.

This horse and rider most likely depict the spirit of imperialism and worldwide conquest that will take place near the end. In history, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome all sought to conquer the world. In the last days, a final rider will appear seeking to bring the whole earth under one unified rule.

“Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, ‘Come.’ I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer” (6:1,2).

Seal 2: The red horse: the world at war.

The attempt of the first rider to enforce a unified authority has disintegrated into nationalistic rivalry as kings and kingdoms turn upon one another. Jesus said: *“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom”* (Matt.24:7).

“When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, ‘Come.’ And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him” (6:3,4).

Seal 3: The black horse: economic chaos and famine.

Economic chaos always accompanies worldwide conflict. The inflation rates described here are 10x normal. The end result is deprivation, especially for the most vulnerable. As Jesus said: *“And in various places there will be famines . . .” (Matt.24:7,8).*

“When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, ‘Come.’ I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine” (6:5,6).

Seal 4: The ashen horse: death to ¼ of the earth.

The loss of life is staggering. If the 4th seal is still part of the *“beginnings of birth pangs”* and if the rise of the antichrist comes next (Matt.24:15ff), then this final great world conflict described in the first 4 seals and the massive loss of life may be the very impetus which causes the world to look for a savior and healer, which they mistakenly find in the antichrist. (The 5th seal, martyrdom, fits within this sequence.)

“When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, ‘Come.” I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth” (6:7,8).

Seal 5: Martyrs cry out for God to bring justice.

Jesus said: *“Then they will deliver you to tribulation and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name (Matt.24:9).* The rise of the antichrist, described later in this book, will lead to the persecution of God’s people on earth (Revelation 13:5-10).

“When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the

earth?’ And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also” (6:9-11).

Seal 6: Cosmic signs that cause great fear.

These cosmic signs attending the end times are familiar in Scripture (Isaiah 2:10,19,21; 13:10; Jeremiah 4:29; Joel 2:31; 3:15; Zephaniah 1:14-18; Matthew 24:29). They signal a great change in the entire created order – here, that “*the great day of wrath has come.*” It seems paradoxical to speak of “*the wrath of the Lamb*” since lambs are very gentle; yet this Lamb brings judgment because the judgment He already bore has been despised and rejected by so many.

“I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’” (6:12-17).

Interlude: God’s Special Witnesses Marked for Protection

Before the 7th and final seal is opened, a group of servants of God on earth are sealed for protection from what is about to come. There is specificity here in that those who are sealed are *Jews from the 12 tribes of Israel – 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes*. Four angels are instructed to hold back the winds (of judgment) until they are sealed. God cares for and protects His servants, even as these judgements fall on earth.

“After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, ‘Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.’ And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the

tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed” (7:1-8).

There is no reason to spiritualize the above passage to make it refer to the people of God more generally (Christians, the Church, etc.) when it refers specifically to *Jews* who are sealed, even naming the tribes of Israel from whom these servants come. Further, the passage dealing with 144,000 Jews is immediately followed by a passage that deals with a great multitude from *every nation and tribe and people and tongue*. Thus, the most natural sense of the above passage is that God will have 144,000 Jewish witnesses in the last days – witnesses who have come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah – who are testifying on earth on behalf of the Lamb in heaven. Because of their task, God marks them out for special protection as they take their stand for Him in a very hostile world. They appear again at 14:1-5, with the Lamb in heaven.

Interlude: A Multitude Awaits Christ’s Triumphant Entry

We shift from the 144,000 special witnesses to a “triumphal entry” scene. The palm branches and singing remind us of Jesus’ 1st triumphal entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of His passion week. Now Jesus is preparing to ride back into human history, not as the suffering Savior, but as the conquering King; not on a donkey, but on a white war horse. At His first coming He came to make peace between God and man, through His death on the cross. At His second coming, He will come to make war against all who have rejected Him (19:11ff).

We are given an important clue here concerning the time-period being described in the previous 6 seals. The great multitude John sees before the throne and before the Lamb are those who “*have come out of the Great Tribulation*” (7:14). In His Olivet discourse, Jesus described this same intense period of time (the Great Tribulation) that would unfold on earth just prior to His 2nd coming (Matthew 24:21).

“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around

the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, 'Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.' Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, 'These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?' I said to him, 'My lord, you know.' And he said to me, 'These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes'" (7:9-17).

What is unclear in this passage is *how* this great multitude came out of the Great Tribulation. We know that there will, in the last days, be a gathering together of God's people on earth and a taking up of them into heaven (Matt. 24:31; 1Thess. 4:17). This is often called "the rapture" from the Latin word "rapio" used in the Latin translation of "caught up" in 1Thess.4:17. However, the current passages has a tone of *suffering and hardship* (note the references to hunger, thirst, heat and tears, v.16-18), not of sudden rescue via the rapture. Thus, it seems that these people have come out of the Great Tribulation through suffering and death as a result of their testimony for Christ (which is a repeated theme throughout Revelation).

Seal 7: The 7 Trumpets about to Sound

Unlike the previous 6 seals that all unfolded specific events, the 7th seal unfolds a new sequence of 7 events under the figure of 7 trumpets. In other words, the 7th seal contains all 7 trumpets, indicating an escalation and intensification of divine judgment as history moves closer to the 2nd coming of Christ. Before the 7 trumpets begin to sound, the 7th seal also reveals a *prayer scene*. There is silence in heaven as God receives the prayers of the saints on earth, rising up like sweet incense into His throne-room. The setting is very heavy as the prayers of the saints have everything to do with the divine judgments that have been progressively unfolding on earth, leading to great calamity among the inhabitants of the earth, as well as trials and suffering for the people of God who remain on earth. They may well be praying for the speedy return of Jesus, along the lines of Paul's prayer: "*Come quickly (maranatha) Lord Jesus!*" (1Corinthians16:22).

“When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel’s hand. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake” (8:1-5).

THE SEVEN TRUMPETS: 8:2 – 9:21

The 7 trumpets represent a severe escalation in the judgments of God falling on earth from the throne-room of heaven. They depict 1/3rd judgments upon various aspects of the created order. It is an act of divine mercy that the first 4 trumpet judgments fall on the natural order (earth, sea, water, sky) so that humanity may observe and have time to reconsider their standing before God.

Trumpet 1: 1/3rd of the earth scorched by fire.

We have seen the wildfire devastation of massive tracts of land; witnessed the aftermath of volcanic eruptions; seen images of cities leveled by the heat of atomic explosions. Imagine 1/3rd of the earth experiencing such fiery devastation. This is not a gradual ‘global warming;’ this is a firestorm from heaven. This is global burning.

“And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them. The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up” (8:6,7).

Trumpet 2: 1/3rd of the sea destroyed.

The image of a mountain of fire falling from heaven into the sea could picture a comet or asteroid crashing through earth’s atmosphere and destroying the seas. But again, these are not ‘natural disasters,’ rather, they are sudden and swift divine judgments.

“The second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood, and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed” (8:8,9).

Trumpet 3: 1/3rd of the fresh water destroyed.

“Wormwood” was synonymous with bitterness and sorrow (Lamentations 3:15,19). Just as God is able to make bitter waters sweet as a sign of His favor (Exodus 15:22-25), so He will make sweet waters bitter as a sign of His judgment. (A number of years ago I read that the Canadian government estimated that fully 1/3rd of their fresh water supply was being killed by acid rain. Yes, it is possible even in human terms to see a judgment like this taking place in our natural world.)

“The third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters. The name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter” (8:10,11).

Trumpet 4: 1/3rd of the heavenly bodies darkened.

In the opening lines of the Bible, God brought light out of darkness. Now, as the divine story concludes, He brings darkness to overwhelm the light. Dense darkness fell over the earth when Jesus was on the cross bearing the divine judgment against sin. In the future, this darkness will fall over the earth again, for its refusal to accept what Jesus did on the cross.

“The fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way” (8:12).

Three “Woes” warning of the Last 3 Trumpets.

Recall that the 7 seals were divided into two groups: the 4 horsemen and the 3 final seals. Similarly, the 7 trumpets are divided into two groups: the 4 judgments on nature and the 3 final “woes” that fall upon humanity itself. An angelic messenger sounds the alarm to earth that the remaining trumpet judgments will be severe.

“Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!”” (8:13).

Trumpet 5: Apollyon unleashes demonic tormentors.

In contrast to the previous judgments, arising from human and natural sources, the 5th trumpet (the 1st Woe) depicts calamity emanating from the spiritual world of demonic beings. Apollyon (or Abaddon) means

“destroyer.” He is called here *“the angel of the abyss,”* and the *“king”* over the demonic creatures that reside in the abyss. These awful locust-like creatures are released upon the earth, to torment mankind for 5 months. They are only permitted to torment those *who do NOT have the seal of God on their foreheads* (note 7:1-3). If these demonic beings are *visible* to human beings, people will feel as if they are living in a sci-fi horror movie. If they are *invisible*, then they could be representative of some mysterious plague or virus that cripples humanity, while killing no one.

“Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him. He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit. Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man. And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them. The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads appeared to be crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle. They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months. They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon. The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things” (9:1-12).

Trumpet 6: An army of 200,000,000 destroys 1/3rd of humanity.

Some see here an extension of the previous demonic force unleashed upon humanity. Others see a literal human army of 200 million. Still others see an army of God’s angels sent to make war against humanity. Whatever the makeup of this destroying army, it results in judgment flowing *“from the golden altar which is before God”* (9:13). The river Euphrates (9:14) was the staging ground in history for many of the major attacks that empires made in their attempt to rule the world. The reference to “four angels” who unleash this judgment may be the same as the four angels mentioned at 7:1-3.

“Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, ‘Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.’ And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind. The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone. A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm. The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts” (9:13-21).

Note the ending lines here: humanity *would not repent and turn back to God*, in spite of the divine judgments and devastation. I think about the proud words we often hear from world-leaders to the effect that *“there is nothing that the human spirit cannot conquer.”* It would appear from the book of Revelation that humanity will be reciting that same theme, right up until the end. Recall the words of Jeremiah the prophet from 500 B.C., as Israel languished in Babylonian captivity: *“You have smitten them, but they did not weaken; You have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent”* (Jeremiah 5:3).

Interlude: The Big Angel and the Little Book

The sounding of the 7th trumpet does not follow immediately after the 6th; rather, we will wait nearly 2 chapters (until 11:15) until trumpet #7 is sounded. The 7th trumpet will take us to the culmination: *“in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets”* (10:7). The 10th and 11th chapters, then present an interlude where John sees how God is using His people to proclaim His message during the final days. God’s Word will go out to the nations, even in the midst of the final judgments. Jesus said this: *“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come”* (Matt.24:14).

At the beginning of ch.10, John is given a little book that he must eat so that he can “*prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings*” (10:8-11). John hears 7 peals of thunder, which may represent another sequence of divine judgments; but these are sealed up so that John was not able to reveal their meaning. (There are always some things in biblical prophecy that remain a mystery.)

“I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire; and he had in his hand a little book which was open. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land; and he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars; and when he had cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices. When the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken and do not write them.’ Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that there will be delay no longer, but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets” (10:1-7).

The strong angel swears on oath before God that when the 7th trumpet sounds, the “*mystery of God*” will be “*finished.*” All the messages that God gave to His former prophets concerning the *Day of the Lord* and the arrival of *His kingdom on earth* are about to find their ultimate fulfillment. Evil will be overthrown, and God’s righteous kingdom will become a reality.

John is instructed to take the little book from the hand of the angel and to eat it, which he did (similar to the call of Ezekiel to prophetic ministry – Ezekiel 2:8-3:3). The scroll is sweet at first, because it is the Word of God; but it becomes bitter because of its contents – severe judgments. The contents of the little book, having been ingested by John, now become the substance of his “*prophesying again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.*” In other words, the rest of the book of Revelation was now being revealed to John so that he could, in turn, reveal these future things to the world.

“Then the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard again speaking with me, and saying, ‘Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land.’ So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, ‘Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.’ I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and in my

mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. And they said to me, 'You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings' (10:8-11).

Since 10:7 tells us that the 7th trumpet brings us to “the end,” we could theoretically take Revelation 19 (the 2nd coming of Christ) and move it forward to follow immediately after the 7th trumpet. Yet, John is given *additional information* that God wants revealed – material that largely revolves around Satan’s final attempt to thwart the plan of God and to establish his own counterfeit kingdom on earth (which has been his plan all along). This additional material gives us profound insight into the *spiritual conflict between God and Satan* that has been raging from the beginning of time, and will culminate in these final great battles.

Interlude: The Two Special Witnesses

John’s first insight gained from the little book he had eaten involves two witnesses of God in the city of Jerusalem. John was told to measure the *temple of God in the holy city*. This presents an interpretive question, for there was no temple at the time John wrote Revelation (it had been destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.). Was John seeing a literal future temple in Jerusalem? Or, is this a figure of speech representing something spiritual? Much of our interpretation of the imagery in Revelation hinges on one’s view of the place of Israel, as a nation, in the end times. (We saw the same interpretive issue at 7:1-8 dealing with the 144,000 “Jewish” witnesses; and will meet it again in ch.12 where Israel is clearly central to the story.) My position is that there is a specific future plan for the nation Israel within God’s end-times program. The O.T. prophecies, if understood at all literally, require such a future plan for Israel. Key passages such as Romans 11 make such a future plan for Israel quite clear. Thus, passages in Revelation that refer to Israel (or things associated with Israel, like a “temple,” a “city”) can be read as literal references to God working in and through the Jewish people in the end times. In the passage below we see two special Jewish witnesses (their miraculous powers make them Moses or Elijah-like figures) speaking out for God in the last days in Jerusalem and the temple for 3-1/2 years, while the city is being trampled underfoot by non-believers. (Note that other passages in the N.T. also seem to require a literal Jewish temple in the last days: 2Thess.2:4; Matt.24:15,16).

“Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, ‘Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it. Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread

underfoot the holy city for forty-two months. And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.’ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire” (11:1-6).

Once again, the interpretive question. Either these two witnesses are symbolic of two groups of people (i.e., Jewish and Gentile witnesses; Israel and the Church; or just the Church), or these are literally two individuals who are uniquely empowered by God to be ‘super-witnesses’ for 3-1/2 years during the final tribulation period. I understand them to be two individuals (perhaps even Moses and Elijah brought back to life) who give bold testimony for Christ in the first 3-1/2 years of the final 7-year tribulation period. Their testimony comes in conjunction with the 144,000 Jewish witnesses sealed by God back in ch.7. Their special ministry is brought to an end by the rise of Satan and his anti-Christ (presumably in the middle of the 7-year tribulation).

“When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth” (11:7-10).

Until recent times, it would have been difficult to imagine how the entire world could simultaneously view the dead bodies of the two witnesses lying in the street of Jerusalem. Now, it is hard to imagine the entire world *not watching*, as connected as we are to moment-by-moment events everywhere. Most striking, however, is the reaction of the world to their deaths: the world rejoices that they have been silenced and their deaths quickly become a reason for holiday-like gift-giving. Suddenly, however, after 3-1/2 days, God interrupts the world’s party as He raises them from the dead and sweeps them away to heaven, *while the world is watching!*

“But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, ‘Come up here.’ Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them. And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly” (11:11-14).

This is a live “rapture” that resembles what will happen to all of God’s people at some point during the tribulation period (1Thess.4:17; Revelation 14:14-16). The sudden earthquake that accompanies the taking up of the two witnesses claims 7,000 lives in Jerusalem. In Baguio City, Philippines, where we lived for 5 years, there was an earthquake that struck the city, claiming 3,000 lives in a moment of time. What John is describing is very comprehensible!

The last line in the above paragraph is significant: *“and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven” (11:13)*. This is one of the only places in Revelation where we see that some people on Earth will respond positively to the divine judgments of the last days. We are told that the 2nd “Woe” (the 6th trumpet) has now been completed.

Trumpet 7: Christ Comes to Rule the World

As we noted before, you could take Revelation 19 (the return of Christ) and place it here, for the end of all things and the earthly reign of Christ have arrived with trumpet 7. We see here the 24 elders worshipping God again, this time because the judgments of God have been poured out and the kingdom of the world has been brought into subjection to Jesus Christ – He has *“begun to reign” (11:17)*.

“Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.’ And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, ‘We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.’ And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were

flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm” (11:15-19).

This worship scene serves as a bookend to the scene in ch.5 where the 24 elders were worshipping God as He prepared to unleash the contents of the 7-sealed book upon the Earth. Now the tone of the worship is one of completion. The judgments have fallen, and now the time has come for God’s righteous rule to begin on the Earth.

We recall that John ate “the little book” and was told that he had much more prophesying to do. Chapters 12-18 will take us on a fascinating and eye-opening behind-the-scenes tour of events in the last days, particularly focusing on the vast system of evil that Satan will construct on earth in opposition to God . . . and then God’s destruction of that counterfeit kingdom.

Discussion Questions

1. As you read through these chapters/notes, what strikes you the most about the overall narrative of end-times events? How does it hit you?
2. Why is it appropriate for the Lamb of God, Jesus, to be involved in bringing judgment on the world in the end? How does this fit with His first coming to Earth and Him being the source of God’s love and grace?
3. Overall, how does the subject of eschatology (end times) impact you? Do you avoid the subject? Does it confuse you? Encourage you? Intrigue you?
4. Why do you think there is a special blessing promised to those who take heed to the words of this book (1:3)?
5. Important: Are you steering clear of those Bible prophecy teachers who try to make *overly specific predictions* based on books like Revelation?