

GOD'S SUPERHEROES

Revelation 11

Introduction:

Chapters 10 and most of 11 form a lengthy interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpet in the book of Revelation. In order to get the sequence of events clear in our minds, I want to once again quickly review the events we have already seen in this series of visions that were given to John as he was in exile on the island of Patmos.

In chapter 1 John received a vision of the Lord himself, revealed in all his glory and majesty. He was given a mandate to write down the things that were to be revealed to him—things that were happening and things that were to happen in the future.

Chapters 2-3 are a series of seven letters from Jesus Christ, the living one, to seven churches in Asia Minor. These were actual churches in seven cities in a region that is today the country of Turkey. They addressed specific characteristics of those seven churches—both positive and negative qualities, which can easily be seen in the church throughout the church age.

In chapter 4 the scene changes. John is transported into heaven to view the things which must take place after this. He is immediately caught up in a scene of glory and majesty, of worship and adoration of God, who is seated on a throne, surrounded by saints and angels expressing his holiness and worthiness.

Chapter 5 introduces us to a scroll, which apparently contains the details of future events which are to happen at the time of the end. No one is found who is worthy to open the scroll and John is in despair, because it appears that these events will be forever sealed. Then he is shown the One who is worthy, the Lamb who was slain, yet was now alive. It is Jesus Christ, the one who died for the sin of the world and is now worthy to open the scroll and set in motion the destiny of this earth and those who dwell in it. The church, composed of believers of the all the ages, is safely in heaven as these events begin to unfold.

Chapter 6 is where things really start to get interesting. John watches as, one by one, the Lamb opens the seals on the scroll. As the seals are opened the events of the Tribulation period begin to unfold. It begins with a period of conquest as a mighty leader sweeps onto the scene promising peace, security and prosperity. However this is soon followed by war and destruction, famine and pestilence, and death for many. Especially for those who choose to surrender to Christ, and refuse the advances of this great leader, the Antichrist.

When we get to the sixth seal, all kinds of calamities and catastrophes—earthquakes and other disasters—come upon the earth. After and interlude in chapter seven to describe the sealing of 144,000 Jewish witnesses, and some other events, the seventh seal is opened. This ushers in a new set of calamities, each one introduced by an angel with a trumpet.

I won't go through those events, only to say that it will be a time of even greater disaster than before. The earth itself will be affected, and there will be death for millions of people. Chapter 9:18 tells us that a third of the population will be killed by the plagues that come on the earth.

Last week we looked at chapter 10, which begins another interlude before we hear the seventh trumpet. In this vision John hears seven thunders which seem to speak of another series of judgments or catastrophes. But John was instructed not to write what he saw and heard, so we do not know the contents of those seven thunders.

He also was shown another scroll—a little scroll—and instructed to take it and eat it. He says in v. 10 – *“And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter.”*

How often that is the case for us. The message of God, and especially the truth of God's future plans, is sweet to the taste for a believer, yet when we absorb the message and digest the truth of what is really in store for those who do not know Christ, it turns to bitterness in the stomach.

Well, that brings us up to chapter 11, and our study this morning.

There are three parts or elements to the 11th chapter – the tribulation temple, the two witnesses, and the seventh trumpet. We do not have time, or we will not take time to go into great detail on these things, but I want to point out a few thoughts on each of these. We will read this chapter in segments – you have already heard vv. 1-3

The Tribulation Temple

During the first part of the Tribulation, sometime before the midpoint of that 7-year period, the Jews will rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. It is difficult to see, in the current situation, how that will happen as the Islamic temple, the Dome of the Rock, is situated on the temple mount. But God is quite capable of dealing with that. So John is given a reed—a measuring stick—and instructed to measure the temple, the altar, and those who worship there. This measuring signifies God's ownership. The temple and those who worship there are his.

However, he is instructed not to measure the outer court. This would be what was known as the Court of the Gentiles. That John is instructed not to measure the outer court symbolizes God's rejection of the unbelieving Gentiles who have oppressed his covenant people.

"...trample the holy city..." Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome all oppressed Jerusalem in ancient times. This verse refers to the future devastating destruction and oppression of Jerusalem by the forces of the Antichrist.

The Two Witnesses

Starting in v. 3 we are introduced to the two witnesses. I would like to read vv. 3-14.

A couple of questions immediately come to mind. Who are they? What is their duty and their purpose? John MacArthur, in his study Bible says that these are "...individuals [who are] granted special power and authority by God to preach a message of judgment and salvation during the second half of the tribulation. The OT required two or more witnesses to confirm testimony, and these two prophets will be the culmination of God's testimony to Israel: a message of judgment from God and of his gracious offer of the gospel to all who will repent and believe.

Discuss briefly some views regarding the identity of these two men:

- Moses and Elijah
- Enoch and Elijah
- Probably neither of the above, but two men especially appointed by God for this task. Their ministry is very similar to that of Moses and Elijah.

Their ministry will last for 1260 days – forty-two months, or 3½ years. God will give them incredible powers.

- Absolute power over their enemies and those who oppose them
- Power to shut up the sky – no rain. Reminiscent of Elijah...
- Ability to turn water into blood and bring plagues upon the earth – reminiscent of Moses...

However, when their ministry is finished (they have finished their testimony) the Antichrist will overpower them and they will be killed. For 3½ days their bodies will lie in the streets – a travesty in Middle-Eastern culture, where it is customary to bury a body the same day, if at all possible.

There will be great rejoicing over the death of these prophets, by those who hate and oppose God and anyone who represents Him – see v. 10.

But their joy and celebration will be short-lived. After 3½ days God will breathe life into them and they will stand to their feet, causing great fear on those who saw them. They are then taken up to heaven in a cloud while their enemies look on. Immediately there is a great earthquake and thousands of people are killed.

There is much more that could be said about this passage and the two witnesses, but I want to move on to look at the remainder of chapter 11. This is the end of this interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpet. Look at v. 14 – the third woe – God's final judgment is soon coming on the earth.

The Seventh Trumpet

Read verses. 15-19.

Mention David Levy's commentary...

The blowing of the seventh trumpet introduces the third woe and contains the seven bowl judgments, which are not poured out upon the earth until later (16:1ff). Again, the scene moves from earth into heaven, where John hears a multitude of voices declaring, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" (v. 15). The phrase "has become" views Christ's future rule over this world as having already been accomplished. Christ will reclaim rule over the kingdoms of this world at His Second Coming. This will settle forever the question of who is the sovereign ruler over planet Earth.

When they hear this, "the twenty-four elders...fell on their faces, and worshiped God" (v. 16) by giving Him "thanks" (v. 17). They thank God for:

- Who He is: "...Lord God Almighty, who is, and was..." – the Received Text adds, "...and is to come." They thank God for His worldwide rule: "because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned" (v. 17).
- His wrath on the wicked: "The nations raged, but your wrath came" (v. 18). This reminds me of Psalm 2 – *"Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.' He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 'As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.'"* This, in Revelation, is the fulfillment of God's wrath that will be poured out upon the nations, who will set themselves against Christ at His Second Coming.
- For rewarding the works of the righteous: "...and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great..." (v. 18).
- For judging worldwide wickedness: "...and for destroying the destroyers of the earth" (v. 18). God will destroy every kind of wickedness on the earth before setting up the Millennial Kingdom.

At the conclusion of this praise hymn, John reports, "the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his covenant" (v. 19). This is not the ark of the covenant translated to heaven before the destruction of Solomon's Temple, but the original ark in God's Temple. The Tabernacle fixtures were patterned after things in heaven (Hebrews 9:23 refers to "...the copies of the heavenly things). The descriptions of "lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail" (v. 19) are a fitting conclusion to the sounding of the seventh trumpet, whose judgments will soon be poured out upon the earth.

Conclusion

Well, we have come to the point again of asking, so what? How does all of this affect us today? Well, directly, it does not have much bearing on our life today. But when we realize what the future holds, and how close we may be to the events described in the book of Revelation, we ought to be concerned.

Looking at all that is happening around us today, we sense that the world is moving swiftly toward a time of judgment. The question we must ask ourselves is, does it matter to us? Do we care that people are lost and heading for eternity without Jesus Christ?

Like the two witnesses, we in the church are messengers with a mandate to proclaim the message of repentance and judgment to our generation—while there is still time.