

Commentary on the Revelation

- I. Prologue, 1:1-20
 - A. The Introduction, vv. 1-3
 - B. The Salutation, vv. 4-8
 - C. The Vision, vv. 9-20
- II. “The Things Which Are”, 2:1-3:22
- III. “The Things That Shall be,” 4:1-22:5
 - A. The divine right to judge and reward, 4:1-5:14
 - B. The divine judgment of God’s enemies, 6:1-19:21
 - 1. The first cycle: the seal judgments, 6:1-8:5
 - 2. The second cycle: the trumpet judgments, 8:6-11:17
 - a. The six trumpet judgments, 8:6-9:21
 - b. The second interlude, 10:1-11:13

Just as there was a break between the sixth and seventh seals there is another after the sixth trumpet extending from 10:1-11:13. It differs from the previous interlude because it is a separate vision than that of the seals. John is once more commissioned, the third instance. This time the focus of his commission is to address believers in reference to the trumpet judgments justifying the basis of the judgment on the unbelievers. Commenting on this second interlude between the sixth and final judgments Mounce writes, “These interludes are not so much pauses in the actual sequence of events as they are literary devices by which the church is instructed concerning its role and destiny during the final period of world history (205).” *Note: we will be spared of the awfulness of the Great Tribulation but not of its portents and shadows.*

1) The little book, 10: 1-11

In chapter one, Jesus appeared to John and gave him the content of the letters to the seven churches (2-3). In chapter four, Jesus appeared in heaven to take a scroll from the Father (5) that contained the seals and later trumpets (6-9). Before the seventh in each case is an interlude (here the seventh is in chapter 11). In chapter 10, an angel brings to John from Jesus a scroll that he is commanded to eat.

2) The “angel,” vv. 1-3

a) His appearance, v. 1

From the throne room of God (Ch. 5), an angel descends clothed with a cloud (only God is said to come in clouds in the Bible [an exception being Dan 7:14 where the reference is to the Son of Man, Jesus Christ]. In this case, the “angel” is Christ who was given the right to judge. Further, the

“angel’s face” is like the sun (Rev 1:16) and feet as “fire” suggests the wilderness presence of God.

b. His possession, v. 2

The “angel” has in his possession a small scroll or book that He hands to John; the book John is to consume and proclaim. The content of the book is described in 10:11 as “prophecy against many people, and nations and tongues and kings,” likely referring to the chapters that follow.

Is the scroll the same as the book the Lamb opened in chapter 5? While there are minor differences (size and receiver), the similarities are weighty (both are opened, both are held by Christ, both compares the messenger to a lion, in both a strong angel cries out, both are related to Daniel’s prophecy, both deal with the destiny of people, in both someone approaches a heavenly being and takes the book).

c. His voice, v. 3

Often thunder indicates judgment though in this context the meaning is unclear. It seems to be a series of judgments that John was forbidden to describe.

3) The announcement, vv. 4-7

a. The command, v. 4

The instruction not to reveal the content of the seven thunders seems to be drawn from Dan 12.

b. The declaration, vv. 5-7

The context behind the angel, read Jesus, standing on the earth and sea is that of absolute sovereignty and authority. What we see here is the same as that of chapters 4 and 5; God and Christ are without peer and able to judge.

The content of the declaration is that the final judgment has arrived; God’s purposes are said to be completed. What the angel told Daniel was sealed up until the end of times is now about to be revealed; what the prophets predicted is about to unfold.

Says Stott, “The fact that the seventh trumpet does not sound until xi. 15 is no contradiction. The intervening sections do not describe a series of happenings intervening chronologically between the sixth and seventh trumpets. Rather they represent a parenthesis in which the task of the church throughout the ages comes before us (140).”

c. The prophet, vv. 9-11

The parallels between God and Jesus in chapter five are evident between Jesus and John here; Johns take the book and explains its meaning.

Taking of the book by John suggests the acceptance of his commission, eating indicates that he assimilated the message with a view to proclaiming its contents. The bitterness of the scroll is related, in part, to the judgmental nature of its message. The sweetness of it is likely due to the redemption of those who would be rescued because (1) God's righteousness is revealed in the just judgment of sin, (2) such punishment demonstrates that Christians have suffered unjust at the hands of unbelievers, and (3) the fact of impending judgment is an encouragement to true believers to persevere in the faith.

This is the third time John is appointed to proclaim the message of the visions he received (1:10-20, 4:1-2). The two previous commissions related to the content of chapters 2-3 and 4-9 respectively; here it relates to the next chapter as well as the rest of the book.

The phrase "prophecy again" can be translated "prophecy against." Either translation has justifiable merit though the former seems to have more contextual support.

2) The two witnesses, 11:1-13

The most pressing question in approaching this chapter is how to read the "two witnesses?" Is it to be read literally or figurative? If the latter is valid, in what sense is it figurative? If John had viewed these as literal figures, it would seem that he would have chosen a literary form other than an apocalyptic vision (is the red dragon to be taken literally in chapter 12?).

There is considerable discussion over the exact meaning of the measuring of the temple, as well as the two witnesses. However the point of the chapter is that God protects His people in spite of satanic opposition and through them proclaim the gospel of the divine kingdom until it is fully manifest.

a) The temple, vv. 1-2

Perhaps the most crucial question is the meaning of "measuring" and the "temple." A possible contextual clue is the parallel between the "seals" interlude (7) and the one here. If valid, then the "temple of God" is the believing community. This seems to be sustained by the fact that the measuring has to do with the people of the temple, not the temple per se ("those who worship there, v. 1). What is clear is that throughout the book the references to the temple are neither to a past temple or a literal one; they are either references to the heavenly temple (3:12, 21:22) or the presence of God among His people (remember this is a vision!). Also, the altar seems to be related to 6:9-10), the worship of God's people. Thus, the temple is the gathering of God's people at any given time in the history of the church and the altar is symbolic of their

sacrificial worship.

It is interesting that John is told to “measure the people.” As such, the imagery of “measuring” conveys the idea of marking off the people of God with a view to their protection and service paralleling the believers’ mark on the forehead in 7:3-4.

If the “temple” is being used by John to symbolize the people of God, he is likely using the “outer court,” an area not to be measured, as the realm of the nations (2:26, 10:11). They are not to be measured because, as John used these terms as images, they are outside the redemption and protection.

It would also seem that the “holy city” can be interpreted as the people of God collectively (see 3:12). Further, forty-two months or 3&1/2 years would also be symbolic of the time or duration of the ministry of the people of God. John may be drawing a link from the duration of Elijah’s ministry, the length of the wilderness sojourn comprising 42 encampments, or, but less likely, the length of our Lord’s ministry. What would, then, be emphasized by John is that ministry involves strength, suffering, and perseverance.

b) The witnesses, vv. 3-6

The reason for the vision of “measuring,” identifying the people of God and the fact of their need of endurance, is explained in these verses. While many have sought to identify the two personages, it seems that the context, the previous verses, emphasize God’s people as a collectivity, not as individuals. The “two witness” present symbolically the people of God, its function, turmoil, and destiny paralleling that of their Lord. The reasons for this approach are several: 1) taking these verses in the context of the previous ones and seeing them as a whole, 2) they are referred to as “two lampstands (v.4)” which seems to identify them with the churches (1:12-2:5), 3) in v.7 the “two witnesses are attacked, by God’s enemies which is taken from Dan 7:21 which refers to nations, not individuals, 4) that the world sees these witnesses as defeated would seem to suggest that the referent is more than two, 5) throughout the book the emphasis on witnessing encompasses the entire body of believers. Hence the 144,000, the sealed, and the two witnesses are the same in that they symbolical represent God’s people at a given time.

Why the emphasis on two witnesses? It would seem that the answer is found in the OT legislation that two witnesses are required to establish a truth as evidence in a court of law.

The “two olive trees” is like drawn from Zech. 4:3, 11, 14, the context being the return of the exiles from Babylon under

Zerubbabel, a descendent of David, and Joshua, a descendent of Aaron. If this approach is correct John applies the “olive-tree” image to the community of believers to emphasize their kingly and priestly role, to rule and represent (1:6, 5:10, 20:6).

The purpose of the measuring is made explicit in v. 5; it is a symbol of divine protection in the extension of their witness to Jesus. “Fire out of their mouth” seems to be the overcoming proclamation of the witness of the believers, just as the “sword from the mouth of Jesus” in chapter 1 symbolizes the declaration of judgment on unbelievers.

The length of the symbolic ministry of the “witnesses” is the same as those “measured;” God’s protective mercies will protect them until their work is done and then, after what appears to be the defeat of, they will rise victoriously.

c) Their death, vv. 7-10

“The Beast” from the domain of Satan (abyss, 9:1, 20:1), a likely reference from Dan 7, suggests a composite symbol of the four nations under the control of Satan, the anti-Christ figure. Unbelievers, nations, will persecute believers (“make war”) even unto death in some cases. Exposing bodies to public view is the height of contempt! The word “body (v. 8)” is singular, not plural, suggesting that the “two” are a single entity.

The location of “the great city” is the subject of much debate among the scholars. A clue, perhaps, is that the word “where” in Revelation does not introduce something literal, but symbolic. Also, Jerusalem is called Sodom, but nowhere else is it called Egypt. The difficulty of interpreting the city as symbolic is the reference to the city “where the Lord was crucified (Revelation is very difficult at times).”

d) Their resurrection, vv. 11-13

The “3 1/2” days is likely symbolic, being drawn from Daniel, of the time of persecution. The return of breath suggests the “dry bones” of Ezek. 37. Says Stott, “History has often seen the church oppressed to the very verge of extinction, but it has always seen it rise again from the verge of death. Each such resurrection strikes consternation into the hearts of her oppressors (151).”

The reaction of unbelievers, the event being part of the final judgment, even the precursor to it, is fear, not the fear of belief but of hostility, rejection, and obstinacy.

The “witnesses,” the believing remnant, is called to the presence of God. The loud voice from the cloud is the Angel of the Lord, Christ Himself (10:3). Ascension through clouds is a

symbol of victory, vindication, and acceptance. Believers are called home! This should remind us of Christ's ascension (Acts 1); we will share in His victory and vindication.

The "great earthquake" is a symbol of the beginning of the last judgment (the same image appears in 6:12). For unbelievers, earth dwellers, the consequence is fear of God, not faith in God. This marks the beginning of the final judgment in the end of times.

With this verse the parenthesis (10:1-11:13) ends.

3) The seventh trumpet: The third woe (Christ triumphant), vv. 14-19

a) The announcement, vv. 14-15

(1) Stated, v. 14

The third woe or seventh trumpet parallels the seventh seal judgment; it entails the final judgment of the world and the establishment of the Kingdom of God in its fullness forever.

(2) Declared, v. 15

"Has become" is a statement of the end of fallen human governments and the beginning of the eternal reign of God. The end of times has come!

The advent of the eternal kingdom is a judgment in two senses: it is the final destruction on God's enemies and the final redemption of God's people (judgment having a negative and positive connotation).

"Our Lord and of His Christ" completely identify the unity of equality that exists between God the Father and God the Son.

b) The praise of heaven, vv. 16-17

(1) The fact of worship, v. 16

The angelic hosts are overwhelmed with praise that God has begun to reign in absolute triumph, falling prostrate before the throne of God.

(2) The words of worship, vv. 17-18

"Lord God, Almighty" combines three names of God: "Jehovah" meaning the covenant-keeping faithful one; God or meaning the creator, provider, and sustainer (Elohim); and El Shaddai, the strong or compassionate one.

Evidence that the seventh Trumpet deals with the final judgment on mankind is that Christ is worshipped as the "was" and "is," not "was," "is," and "is to come." At this point in John's vision, Christ has come.

The interconnection between the reign of Christ and the wrath

of God is made clear in v. 18. The reason for the judgment, at least in part, is stated as those who destroy the earth, meaning the people of the earth.

Not only does judgment precede the eternal reign of Christ, the saints receive their “reward,” which appears to be the experience of final and complete redemption.

(3) The majestic finality, v. 19

“The temple” is most likely symbolic of the presence of God in the midst of His redeemed people. The “ark,” the dwelling presence of God, is mentioned, but the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies is not suggesting that access into the presence of God is unimpeded.

Teaching Points:

1. As we have indicated previously, the Bible continues to be a relevant book in every century, for every generation of believers, because there are many anticipatory fulfillments of what is to final. The tragedies that we read of in our newspapers are shadows of the judgment of God that will someday bring time to an end; the persecution of Christian also! When you see “shadows” do they remind you of things yet to happen (the NT writers seem to have approached the OT events in that way, as shadows)? Do blessings teach you that there are greater blessings to follow someday? Does sadness remind you that the hell that awaits unbelievers will never be your portion? Do you understand that this broken existence is the only “hell” you will ever experience?
2. We live in a cultural/religious milieu in which Jesus is viewed as iconic, but only as a heroic, religious figure that somehow has weathered the passage of time and has evolved through the experiences of life as some kind of model. However, our passage tells us that He is the “Angel of the Lord,” the messenger of God, the one who through death and triumph has become the judge of the destinies of everything. He is Jehovah God, the Lord. He holds in His hands the right of judgment, the Little Scroll. However, there is no judgment for us except the declaration that we can enter His presence forever. Can you imagine such privilege? Can you be thankful enough? Our days may be dark, but it is only shadows that will pass into the beauty of the presence of God who loves us.
3. We are the “measured people.” Like the 144,000 of chapter 7, you and I are among the protected people of God. This does not imply that our days will be without difficulties, but it does mean that the end of our journey will contain unimaginable joys and delights that will no longer be a passing shadow like a tranquil vacations or a special gift on a birthday. The one who holds the scroll of judgment hold us in His protective, loving care. You and I have the mark of the ownership of the Lord upon us. How does the realization that we are the “measured” people bring you delight? How does it factor into the choices you make in your life, family, or business? Does being different make a difference?
4. The experience of the “two witnesses” tells us that tragedy may befall us in our witness for Christ, the world not always being a friendly environment for Christ-followers, contains a lesson that should inspire us. Though the world does not appreciate the one we adore, though the world is the enemy of Christ, though the world has left behind a stream of martyrs, a resurrection day is coming for all of us. Though we may not end our lives as martyrs, we will end it grappling with health issues that eventually will

overwhelm us. However, no matter what our end, there is a resurrection day ahead. Does that not bring a smile to your face? Does that make your day more manageable? Does this not fill you with hope on the darkest of days?

5. There is a balance between loving our enemies and praising God for exacting just judgment upon them. Clearly, in our passage the saints and angels rejoice that God in the final judgment will express His justice in crushing His enemies, consigning them to their just destiny. What does this teach us? Seeking justice is not the same as seeming revenge. Defined by the character of a holy God justice demands conformity and anything contrary to the holy character of God is contrary to all that He is as God. Therefore, justice demands the action of wrath of his part. In God, love and justice meet in perfect holiness. Do you find that your manner of caring is more people-centered than it is God-centered? Do you possess the love that God possesses including justice? Do you overlook sin in your life by misinterpreting the love of God? Love and justice, mercy and wrath meet in Jesus.
6. The names of God, sung by the angels and saints in heaven, are a profitable study, a grand stimulus for spiritual meditation. Here is a wonderful description of the character of God. Jesus Christ, the one who holds the scroll, is Lord; He is the God who is the great “I am,” the eternal one who condescends to enter into relationship with fallen creatures. Wow! He is God, here meaning the creator and sustainer of all that has been created. He is Almighty, El Shaddai. In essence He is beautiful. Do you spend time meditating on the names of God? Do you think about the stories attached to these names in the OT? They will fill your mind with great thoughts and you heart with affection
7. In chapter 1 Jesus is declared to be the one that “is, was, and will be.” Here, as our chapter ends and the final judgment comes with the new creation, the re-creation, following wherein God’s people dwell in His presence, Jesus is the one who “is and was.” Wow!! Thus, time has end. Thus, there is no more future. The future will become an eternal present. Is that not exciting? In the future when Jesus is adored for His accomplishments and character, we will be in His presence, the true temple of God, a temple without a curtain. We will see the “ark” of the presence of God. Do you not rejoice that you have a bright future? Are you not thrilled to think there will be an eternal day when time will stop and you will enjoy endless delight?