



# *Revelation*

## *Cracking the Code*

or

## *Why you won't be left behind!*

Week 4

Scene 3 – Warning to the World

(Revelation 8 - 11)

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## *What will John see in scene 3?*

- ❖ Some of the most perplexing visions in the whole book!
- ❖ Chapter 8 begins the third cycle of visions
  - First we had seven churches, then seven seals, and now seven trumpets
- ❖ These will be trumpets of terror and of hope
  - We'll get everything from hail to locusts!
- ❖ As with the seals, six trumpets are blown, the terror crescendos relentlessly, and just when it seems that all must end – there is another interlude before the seventh trumpet.
  - We meet two witnesses who will prophesy for 3½ yrs, showing that the faithfulness of the suffering Christians causes others to give glory to God. The wait and the suffering of God's people will not have been in vain!

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## *Angels & Trumpets*

- ❖ After 30 minutes of silence, John sees seven angels to whom seven trumpets are given.
  - Trumpets were used to signal the beginning of an attack, but they also used by cities to warn of a coming attack.
- ❖ An angel offers up the smoke of incense, which along with the prayers of saints, rises to God. The angel then fills the censer with **fire** from the altar and throws it upon the earth!

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## *The first four trumpets – The fire of God*

- ❖ Compare this with the opening of the first four seals
- ❖ The first trumpet
  - Hail and fire and blood are hurled at earth – 1/3 of the earth and 1/3 of the trees are burned up, as is all the grass.
- ❖ The second trumpet
  - The mountain of fire is tossed into the sea and 1/3 of the sea is turned to blood and 1/3 of sea creatures and ships are destroyed
- ❖ The third trumpet
  - A great burning star falls into the water and makes it bitter and deadly. Wormwood is a bitter plant.
- ❖ The fourth trumpet
  - A 1/3 of the sun is struck – and a 1/3 of the light goes out

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## *A few thoughts on the four trumpets*

- ❖ Notice that there is nothing about people being harmed. It is as if we are being hemmed in – everything around us is being destroyed as we watch.
- ❖ Even in these visions, John calls on the OT
  - Jeremiah 23:15 – To the prophets of Jerusalem who have turned from God, the Lord of Hosts says, “I am going to make them eat wormwood, and give them poisoned water to drink.”
- ❖ These visions are meant to strip away all our pretensions to earthly security. They are meant to WAKE US UP – the only security is in God and the Lamb – and we are called to repentance!
  - You can't scare someone into loving you, but you *can* shock them into waking up and confronting reality. These visions put us all in the foxhole!
- ❖ There are three woes to come -- “Woe, woe, woe.”

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## *The Fifth Trumpet is Blown*

- ❖ A star falls from heaven and he(!) opens a bottomless pit – truly, it is as if the gates of hell are opened!
- ❖ A huge cloud of smoke rises from the pit and darkens the sky. Swarms of unspeakable locusts are unleashed – they are perversions of creation! They are told to leave the grass unharmed and concentrate their terror on those people who are not sealed by God. They only torture, they do not kill.
  - Do not ask how there can be green grass when it was all burned up in Rev 8:7! Doing so makes the book into something it is not.
  - The king of the locusts is Abaddon/Apollyon. These words mean destruction/destroyer.
  - People do not try to escape death – they seek it.
- ❖ The fifth trumpet is the first of the three woes.

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## *The Sixth Trumpet is Blown*

- ❖ Four angels have been held back (in reserve I guess!). They are now released to command an army of 200 million! By the time they finish their horrific work, 1/3 of humankind is dead, killed by fire and smoke and sulfur spewing from the nostrils of this demonic cavalry.
- ❖ So . . . here is the question. Has this finally been enough to move humankind to repentance, to strip away their pretensions to self-sufficiency, to wake them up?
- ❖ NO!! V.20: The humans do not repent; they do not give up their idols; they continue to murder and steal.
  - So . . . are these trumpets of destruction able to bring about repentance? Astonishingly, NO! We can't be scared into love, perhaps we can't even be scared into repentance.
  - ***What will?*** *What will bring the humans to repentance?*

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## *John's Commission is Renewed*

- ❖ A mighty angel descends – surely, this is it! John hears seven thunders and is about to write what he hears, but is stopped.
- ❖ The angel has the scroll. It has been unsealed – the Lamb did that – but its message has not been read.
- ❖ It is a bittersweet message that John takes within himself – he eats it!
  - Sweet because it is the Good News! “Announced” in v. 7 is *evangelizein* – “Gospel-ed.”
  - Bitter because the working out of God's purposes involves the suffering of his people.
  - Do we “take and eat” Scripture? What a thought-provoking image.
- ❖ Just as the Great Multitude has people from all nations, John is told to prophesy to all nations.

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## *The Temple and the Two Witnesses in “Left Behind”*

- ❖ In a literalistic interpretation:
  - This passage is speaking about a literal temple
  - But the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70AD by the Romans, so if this passage is speaking of an actual building, the Temple will have to be rebuilt.
  - Those worshiping in the Temple are assumed to be Jews and the references to the altar are taken to mean the restoration of OT sacrifice.
  - The years become literal too and we get the seven year clock – 3 1/2 years here and 3 1/2 years of the Beast’s rule in 13:5.
- ❖ If we read Chapter 11 in this way, it isn’t hard to understand some Christians’ focus on the nation of Israel as a precursor to the rebuilding of the Temple. That must happen for Jesus to return and, indeed, it will signal that the second coming is at hand.

***BUT***

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## *The Presence of God in the OT*

- ❖ The “deliciousness” of presence
- ❖ The Israelites understood themselves to be the people of the presence – the ones with whom God would dwell
  - Moses at Mt. Sinai, the place of God’s dwelling
    - Exodus 19
  - The tabernacle
    - Exodus 25-27
    - Exodus 33:14-16
  - The temple – the dwelling place of God
    - Ezekiel 10: the departure of God’s presence, God’s glory
    - Malachi 3:1 – the promised return of God to the temple
- ❖ God’s presence and God’s Spirit
  - The anointing of David – 1 Samuel 16:13
  - The anointing of Jesus – Luke 3:22 & Acts 10:38
  - Isaiah 63:9-14

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## *The Spirit as the Renewed Presence of God*

- ❖ This is key to understanding Paul and the NT
  - For Paul, God has returned to the temple. The Spirit is how God presently dwells in his holy temple.
  - Jeremiah 31:31-34 – The new covenant written on hearts, not the tablets of Moses
    - Compare to 2 Cor 3:1-6
  - Ezekiel 36-37; esp. 22-32 (see v. 27) – God will give his people a new heart and a new spirit
    - Compare to 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8
- ❖ The Spirit is the key to the new covenant as a fulfilled reality in the lives of God's people.
- ❖ The Spirit dwells in and among the people of God
  - Romans 8:9-11; Galatians 4:6; see 1 Cor 16-17 & 2 Cor 6:16

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## *The Church as God's Temple*

- ❖ Corinth – a tough city teeming with temples and temple prostitutes
- ❖ The Christian church in Corinth – a mess!
  - “Church” refers not to a building but to the people of God
- ❖ 1 Cor 3:16-17 (“you” is plural here)
  - “Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.” (NRSV) [look also at v. 9, where Paul compares the church/people in Corinth to a building]
  - The church/people in Corinth is God's temple in Corinth – and God dwells in his temple – God's presence is his Spirit!
- ❖ In John 2, the temple is Jesus' resurrected body.

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## *The Individual Believer as God's Temple*

- ❖ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
  - "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body."
  - "body" refers to the whole self
- ❖ 2 Corinthians 2:14-4:6
  - This lengthy passage is about the ministers of the new covenant, who are unveiled as we enter the sanctuary to behold the glory of the Lord in the face of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is the fulfillment of the promise that God himself would once again be present with his people. The Spirit indwells the people of God corporately and each individual believer.

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## *Back to Revelation!*

- ❖ We've been prepared for this vision of God's oppressed people as the Temple. Remember the pillars in the temple (3:12) and that all the multitude were made priests (5:10).
- ❖ In Rev 11, the witnesses are "lampstands" – the light to the world AND congregations AND standard temple furnishings.
- ❖ The 3½ years comes from Daniel (7:25, 9:27; 12:7) – a book about oppression.
  - Don't take John's time periods too literally. A 30-minute interval before the seventh seal is open? A one-hour long political alliance between the allies of the beast? There are even too many 3½ year periods to add to seven.
  - The figure 3½ was a common way to indicate a limited period of affliction (compare 1 Kings 18:1 with Luke 4:25)

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## *The Two Witnesses*

- ❖ The world has not repented, but these two witnesses are humble and repentant – wearing sackcloth
- ❖ John's vision of the witnesses invokes imagery of Joshua and Zerubbabel and Moses and Jeremiah and Ezekiel.
  - They are called witnesses because they must speak the truth
- ❖ But all this pales in significance to what comes next.
  - As Jesus was faithful all the way to the cross, these two witnesses are faithful all the way to their own death. Jesus did not escape suffering. The witnesses do not. And God certainly never promises us that we will!
  - The two are even denied burial. But they are vindicated, rising to God in the same manner as Jesus.
  - Their death and ascension causes all the citizens still living to give glory to God! How unexpected is this! Could this be why the suffering of the faithful has been allowed to continue?

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## *The Seventh Trumpet is Blown*

- ❖ God's Kingdom has come!!
  - The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of God and the Messiah reigns!
  - The 24 elders fall on their faces worshiping and praising God – the time for judging and rewarding has come.
- ❖ John sees God's temple in heaven opened and he sees the Ark of the Covenant, which had been lost for more than 600 hundred years.
- ❖ In some ways – the book of Revelation could end here!! The story is complete!! God has come out of his temple.
- ❖ But the battle continues – onward to Scene 4 – who is prepared to confront the Ark?

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## *Looking ahead – Scene 4*

- ❖ The time has come to “destroy those who destroy the earth” (11:18).
- ❖ Chapters 12-22 are Act II – “The Defeat of Satan”
  - Satan is thrown from heaven to earth (Chapter 12)
  - The beast and the false prophet conquer (Chapter 13)
  - After these messianic wars, Christ returns (14:14-20)
    - We live in the time of the struggle, as we await Jesus’ return. Will we follow the way of the Beast or the way of God?
- ❖ Next week – we’ll talk about the number of the beast, 666. Who is the beast? John says we ought to be able to figure it out!