

DEMYSTIFYING

REVELATION

SERIES IN THE FINAL BOOK
OF THE BIBLE



Study Guide

Week 4

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Ch 8-11: The Seven Trumpets



Figure 1 Depiction of the blowing of the sixth trumpet - artist unknown¹

Not only does the blowing of the seven trumpets result in more judgment against those oppressing the people of God but we also get introduced to a mighty angel and the mysterious two witnesses. The mighty angel commissions John as a prophet in the line of Ezekiel while the two witnesses operate in supernatural power in a similar way to the prophet Elijah. The imagery gets more abstract with all the judgments occurring in neat thirds and the delivery of plagues and affliction via wild, animal-composite spiritual beings. These composites seem to be evil versions of the four living creatures: human-haired locusts combined with scorpions and lion-headed horses with fiery, plague-dispensing breath.

Against all of this end-of-the-world type imagery, the arrival of the mighty angel comes as an interlude and emotional relief. His delivery of an edible scroll is extremely similar to Ezekiel's prophetic commissioning. Could it be that all John has received so far is part of his training and the second half of the book reveals the most important part of God's message to the church? Before we have time to ponder too much the two witnesses are revealed who deliver mighty miracles in the city of Jerusalem. After they die and rise to the life, the seventh trumpet is blown and worship commences in heaven again. This time we get to glimpse the famed Ark of the Covenant! Good luck Indiana Jones in capturing it now!

¹ <https://za.pinterest.com/pin/241083386288172247/>

REVELATION CHAPTER EIGHT

⁶ Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.



Figure 2 A shofar made from a ram's horn and two silver trumpets

- There are two kinds of trumpet in the OT: The Shofar (made of a ram's horn) is blown in Joshua at the destruction of Jericho (Joshua 6:4-5) and the silver trumpets described in Numbers 10:1-7 for gathering the people to the Tent of Meeting. Trumpets therefore symbolise warfare and worship.

Overview of the Seven Trumpet Judgments							
Judgment	1 Hail/Fire + Blood	2 Volcano	3 Star Fell	4 Darkness	5 Loco-scorpions	6 Hippo-Lions	7 Temple Worship
					1 st Woe	2 nd Woe	3 rd Woe?
Reference	Rev. 8:7	Rev. 8:8-9	Rev. 8:10-11	Rev. 8:12	Rev. 9:1-12	Rev. 9:13-21	Rev. 11:15-19
Action	Firery, Bloody Hail thrown upon the Earth	Thrown into the Sea & 1/3 became Blood	'Wormwood' fell onto 1/3 river and springs	1/3 of: Moon, Sun & Stars struck	Star fell. Given key to Abyss & locusts rise out of it	Four Angels released + 200mil. Hippo-lions	24 elders worship
Result	Burned up: 1/3 of earth, trees & all grass	1/3 of ships and 1/3 of sea creatures died.	Bitter water killed 'many' people	1/3 of their light darkened	People without the seal of God tormented for 5 months	3 plagues kill 1/3 of mankind	Temple opened. Ark seen.

Table 1 Overview of the Trumpet Judgments

1. Hail, Fire & Blood

⁷ The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

- Judgement exposes what is already there. For example, in the judgements on Egypt the Nile is already 'blood red' because of the killing of the baby boys, the judgment reveals this. Egypt is in darkness worshipping the sun god who is not the real God before the sky goes dark. The judgements reveal (apocalypse) what is already there. That's how judgement works.

2. Volcano

⁸ The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood.

- This seems to be describing a volcanic eruption. There was a giant volcanic eruption that occurred in 44 BC that had devastating climate effects on the Roman Republic – crop failures, extreme temperature drop, even the recording of the Sun disappearing after Julius Caesar’s assassination.² While all this happened 130 years or so before Revelation was written it demonstrates the dramatic effect that a volcanic eruption can have on the climate. If an early date is taken for Revelation (during the time of Nero and not Domitian) then the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD might be in view (especially as it situated close to the sea).

“Mount Vesuvius violently spewed forth a deadly cloud of super-heated tephra and gases to a height of 33km (21mi), ejecting molten rock, pulverised pumice and hot ash at 1.5 million tons per second, ultimately releasing 100,000 times the thermal energy of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki bombings... Several Roman cities were obliterated and buried underneath massive pyroclastic surges and ashfall deposits, the best known being Pompeii and Herculaneum... The total population of both cities was over 20,000”. - Wikipedia

⁹ A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

3. Wormwood

¹⁰ The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. ¹¹ The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter.

- Wormwood (See Amos 5:7; 6:12, Prov. 5:4, Lam 3:15 & 19)

“A leafy plant that causes water to become bitter. Though wormwood is not poisonous, it can be combined with other elements that are (e.g., Deut 29:18, where “poisonous and bitter fruit” is actually “gall and wormwood”; Lam 3:19). The object from the sky makes the waters bitter” Faithlife Study Bible

“Wormwood was the fruit of idolatry (Deuteronomy 29:17-18). It was the threat of God through Jeremiah that God would give his people wormwood to eat and the waters of gall to drink (Jeremiah 9:14-15; Jeremiah 23:15)” – W. Barclay

- Rome had a massive problem with lead. Its poisonous effects were not known at the time and lead was used for all their piping. It was also common for Romans to boil wine in lead pots to make a wine syrup that was used to sweeten all sorts of food. The process of creating this syrup in lead pots resulted in lead acetate being produced, which is also sweet. Therefore the Romans tended to favour lead pots over other

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/22/science/rome-caesar-volcano.html#>

metals because of the extra sweetness it produced.³ There is debate as to whether the quantities of lead were enough to poison its residents but the continual piping of spring water through lead pipes probably gave the water a metallic/bitter taste and may be what is being referenced here.

4. Darkness

¹² The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.

- There are a lot of thirds mentioned here (as with many of the trumpet judgments) which seem to be symbolic. It's difficult to interpret these in specific out-workings. For example, a third of the day and a third of the night in blackness is a strange concept. However, prophetic imagery is often used poetically in this way. For example, Isaiah 34 foretells the destruction of Edom (which came to pass). Look at the language used:

*For the LORD is enraged against all the nations,
and furious against all their host;
he has devoted them to destruction, has given them over for slaughter.*

³ *Their slain shall be cast out,
and the stench of their corpses shall rise;
the mountains shall flow with their blood.*

⁴ *All the host of heaven shall rot away,
and the skies roll up like a scroll.
All their host shall fall,
as leaves fall from the vine,
like leaves falling from the fig tree.*

⁵ *For my sword has drunk its fill in the heavens;
behold, it descends for judgment upon Edom,
upon the people I have devoted to destruction.*

Isaiah 34:1-5

- Edom (the kingdom derived from Jacob's twin, Esau) was completely destroyed (and remains barren to this day). However, it's unlikely that the mountains literally ran 'with blood' and that the sky literally 'rolled up like a scroll'. While Isaiah used poetic, figurative language he was foretelling an actual event that occurred in history and this is likely the language being used in this fourth trumpet judgment.
- Given this, it's likely this is referring to the solar eclipses outlined in the notes on the seal judgments.

³ <https://io9.gizmodo.com/the-first-artificial-sweetener-poisoned-lots-of-romans-5877587>

¹³ Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, “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!”

- This is the beginning of a series of judgments called the ‘three woes’ that relate to the 5th, 6th and 7th trumpet judgments. The King James Version of the Bible mistranslated the eagle as an angel but an eagle is definitely in view here. A talking eagle is obviously symbolic language with eagles often representing big-picture prophetic vision (they have a bird-eye view of things) and the Eagle is one of the four animal components of the angelic Living Creatures.

5. Loco-scorpions



Figure 3 A representation of the Abyss with a star falling in the background

REVELATION CHAPTER NINE

9 And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth,

- ‘star fallen from heaven’ - stars often refer to angels (see Rev. 1:20) and this may refer to the fall of Satan from heaven that Jesus witnessed (Luke 10:18).

and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit.

- ‘bottomless pit’ or in the Greek, ‘abyss’. Where demons and fallen angels were thought to be kept—the underworld (see 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6)
- In Jesus’ encounter with the demoniac man, the demons begged Jesus not to send them into the abyss when Jesus expelled them from the man:

“And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss.” Luke 8:31

- William Barclay describes Jewish thought about the abyss at the time:

“The abyss was a vast subterranean cavern beneath the earth, sometimes the place where all the dead went, sometimes the place where special sinners were kept awaiting punishment. It was reached by a chasm reaching down into the earth...”

² He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. ³ Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth.



Figure 4 A photo of a swarm of locusts and a close up of a locust

- This echoes the plague of locusts in Egypt (See Exodus 10:12–15). The imagery of locusts is used in the OT for invading armies (e.g., Jer. 51:27; Nah. 3:15). In the natural, locusts can be devastating when they swarm.

“They will travel in a column a hundred feet deep and as much as four miles long. When such a cloud of locusts appears, it is as if there had been an eclipse of the sun and even great buildings less than two hundred feet away cannot be seen. The destruction they cause is beyond belief. When they have left an area, not a blade of grass is to be seen; the trees are stripped of their bark. Land where the locusts have settled looks as if it had been scorched with a bush fire; not one single living thing is left. Their destructiveness can best be appreciated from the fact that it is recorded that in 1866 a plague of locusts invaded Algiers and so total was the destruction which they caused that 200,000 people perished of famine in the days which followed.

The noise of the millions of their wings is variously described as like the dashing of waters in a mill-wheel or the sound of a great cataract. When the millions of them settle on the ground the sound of their eating has been described as like the crackling of a prairie fire. The sound of them on the march is like heavy rain falling on a distant forest... When they move, they move inexorably on like an army with leaders. People have dug trenches, lit fires, and even fired cannon in an attempt to stop them but without success; they come on in a steady column which climbs hills, enters houses and leaves scorched earth behind. There is no more destructive visitation in the world than a visitation of locusts, and this is the terrible devastation which John sees.” – W. Barclay

⁴ They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. ⁵ They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of

a scorpion when it stings someone. ⁶And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them.

- This swarm of locusts is not a natural swarm of locusts but a demonic one. We know this because they come from the abyss and they do not do what normal locusts do and eat crops. Instead, they attack people who are not part of God's kingdom (*'do not have the seal of God'*). It's difficult to pin down the scorpion-like stings. Could this be a disease that brings about a lot of pain but not death? Malaria, TB, typhoid and gastroenteritis were all prevalent in Rome during the time of Revelation⁴. In such a densely packed city it was easy for an outbreak to occur and then travel with the soldiers to the provinces. Rome's malaria problem occurred during its hotter period from July through to the end of October – a period of five months. If the loco-scorpion plague is referring to mosquitos delivering malaria this may explain the five month period mentioned.



Locust-Scorpions (9:1-12)

- Emerge from the abyss.
- Described in a sevenfold way: head, face, hair, teeth, breastplates, wings, tail.
- Stings harm people but do not kill them
- Scorpions may represent the words of rebellious Israel (See Ezek. 2:6-7)
- Satan falling, authority given and scorpion stings not hurting believers parallels with Luke 10:17-20
- Are these loco-scorpions opponents of the gospel? Persecutors like Paul was?
- The theologian, Beale believes they are demons to torment hardened unbelievers

Horse-Lions (9:13-21)

- A cavalry of 200 million lion-headed horses (hippo-lions) kill 1/3 of mankind
- There is debate as to whether these are demonic.
 - Beale: 'wicked angels' that wound and kill humans
 - But they are also 'angels' released by an angel wearing gems and killing to prevent the worship of idols
- If they are angelic cavalry then their appearance at the Euphrates river would indicate a reconquest of the land. The Euphrates is also mentioned in the Battle of Armageddon (Ch 16)
- Hippo-lions vs loco-scorpions may pre-figure the Kings vs frog demons in Rev. 16:12-16

⁴ Gigante L. *Death and disease in Ancient Rome*

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5dccc6d97c4acfc5d1d70d229/t/5dd1d53548fc0223599e4ed9/1574032694977/Death+and+Disease+in+Ancient+Rome.pdf>

⁷ In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, ⁸ their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; ⁹ they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. ¹⁰ They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails. ¹¹ They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.

- Andreas, Archbishop of Caesarea, held, in his Commentary on Revelation (AD 611)⁵, that the locusts mean evil spirits again permitted to come forth on earth and afflict men with various plagues. This seem likely as they are to 'afflict' those without God's seal. This could come in the form of a pandemic. They are overseen by the angel of the abyss which is probably a chief demon.

¹² The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.

- The other two 'woes' are Rev. 9:14 (release of a demonic army) and Rev 16:1-21 (the seven bowl judgments which arise out of the seventh trumpet judgment).

6. Hippo-Lions

¹³ Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, ¹⁴ saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." ¹⁵ So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind.

- '*who are bound*' – John Wesley in his commentary, states 'These were evil angels, or they would not have been bound. Why, or how long, they were bound we know not.'⁶

¹⁶ The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number.

- Twice ten thousand times ten thousand = 200 million.

¹⁷ And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them: they wore breastplates the colour of fire and of sapphire and of sulphur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulphur came out of their mouths. ¹⁸ By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulphur coming out of their mouths.

- '*fire and smoke and sulphur*' are representative of three plagues that will be released that kill a third of humanity. While it is not clear what these horse-lions ('hippo' is

⁵ Andreas *Patrologia Graeca* vol.106, cols. 215–458 & 1387–94

⁶ Wesley, J. *Explanatory Notes on the Whole Bible* Revelation 9:4

Greek for horse; e.g. a hippopotamus = river horse) are, we know the result is that three plagues come upon the earth. We can assume these are therefore spiritual beings who initiate and/or encourage these plagues to spread.

- There were three main plagues that terrorised the Roman Empire in the few hundred years that followed the writing of Revelation:
 - **The Antonine Plague** (165-180 AD) – this killed 2/3 of the Roman population with a rate of 2000 killed per day at its peak – estimated at 5 million people across the empire⁷.
 - **The Cyprian Plague** (249-262 AD) – Roman residents died at a rate of 5000 per day⁸
 - **The Justinian Plague** (541-549 AD) – 1/5th of the population of Rome died at a rate of 5000 per day at its peak. Estimated to have led to the death of 30-50 million people – approximately 50% of the world’s population at that time⁹



Figure 6 An engraving by Levasseur depicts the angel of death at the door during the Antonine (165 AD) plague of Rome¹⁰

“The Plague of Justinian is the first and the best known outbreak of the first plague pandemic, which continued to recur until the middle of the 8th century.^[1] Some historians believe the first plague pandemic was one of the deadliest pandemics in history, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 25–100 million people during two centuries of recurrence, a death toll equivalent to as much as half of Europe's population at the time of the first outbreak.” - Wikipedia

- Analysis of a German cemetery in Aschheim found *Yersinia Pestis* DNA among the bones of the dead. *Yersinia Pestis* is the causative bacteria of Bubonic Plague (also known as the Black Death: *“this small rural settlement will have lost a minimum of 35-*

⁷ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/what-rome-learned-deadly-antonine-plague-165-d-180974758/>

⁸ <https://www.livescience.com/worst-epidemics-and-pandemics-in-history.html#>

⁹ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/1/140129-justinian-plague-black-death-bacteria-bubonic-pandemic/#>

¹⁰ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/what-rome-learned-deadly-antonine-plague-165-d-180974758/>

53 percent of its population within the space of a few months". This occurred in 555 AD and was a loss from which the village would never fully recover.¹¹

¹⁹ For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails are like serpents with heads, and by means of them they wound.

²⁰ The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, ²¹ nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.



Figure 7 An artist's rendition of the Mighty Angel with the little scroll ¹²

REVELATION CHAPTER TEN

10 Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head,

- 'rainbow' – associated with the glory of God (Ezekiel 1:28 & Rev. 4:3) and also God's everlasting covenant with mankind/creation (Gen. 9:13)

and his face was like the sun,

¹¹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/03/plagues-roman-empire/473862/>

¹² Artist unknown

- Face 'like the sun' – this occurred also with Jesus at his transfiguration (Mat. 17:2) It's a result of being in the presence of God. Moses' face shone after being with God (Ex 34:29) and had to wear a veil (Ex 34:33-35).

and his legs like pillars of fire. ² He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, ³ and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring.

- 'Voice like a lion roaring' – similar to how God's voice is described (See Joel 3:16; Hosea 11:10; Amos 3:8)

When he called out, the seven thunders sounded. ⁴ And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down." ⁵ And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven ⁶ and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay, ⁷ but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.

- the seven thunders spoke something we are not privy to but we are also told that the prophets of old have already declared it. Verse 7 explains this mystery will be fulfilled once the seventh trumpet is sounded (Rev 11:15ff)

⁸ Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." ⁹ So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, "Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." 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. ¹¹ And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."

- There is a strong parallel with Ezekiel and his preparation for prophetic ministry.
- Andrew Wilson states that this combines the imagery of Ezekiel 3 and Numbers 5. Ezekiel eats a scroll which is sweet as honey. What's different here is that the scroll turns bitter in the stomach. In Numbers 5, if somebody was accused of unfaithfulness they would drink bitter water and if it caused the stomach to swell they would be deemed guilty but if it didn't the person would be free.
- John passes this test because his stomach does not swell. However, in Genesis, Israel did not because she was forced to drink the crushed up golden calves in water and then the priest executed those involved (Exodus 32).

REVELATION CHAPTER ELEVEN

11 Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, “Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, ² but do not measure the court outside the temple;

“The word for measuring rod is literally reed. There were certain grasses which grew with stalks like bamboo canes as much as six or eight feet high; these stalks were used as measuring rods. The word rod actually stands for a Jewish unit of measurement, equal to six cubits. The cubit was originally the space from the tip of the elbow to the tip of the middle finger and was reckoned as seventeen or eighteen inches; so the rod is equal to about nine feet.” W. Barclay

- The picture of measuring is common in the visions of the prophets. We find it in Ezekiel, Zechariah and Amos¹³; and no doubt these previous visions were in John's mind. We find the idea of measuring used in more than one way. It is used as a preparation for building or for restoration and also as a preparation for destruction. But here the meaning lies in preservation. The measuring is like the sealing which is described in Revelation 7:2-3; the scaling and the measuring are both for the protection of God's faithful ones in the demonic terrors to descend upon the earth.

leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months.

- 42 months = 1260 days = 3.5 years. This common number in Revelation is derived from a memory deeply etched in Jewish conscience. It's equivalent to many people's association today with the numbers '911' and what happened at the World Trade Centre. In 168 BC, the Greek King, Antiochus Epiphanes sacked Jerusalem and sacrificed a pig to Zeus on the altar of incense in Jewish temple. He then tried to force the Jews to abandon their religion and culture and take on Greek culture – including worship of the Greek pantheon of gods. This resulted in the Maccabean rebellion. It took the Jews 3.5 years retake the city for themselves and re-dedicate the temple and re-establish worship to Yahweh. This led to an eventual period of self-governance of 47 years until 63 BC. The Jews today celebrate this rededication of the temple in the November/December festival of Hanukkah.

³ And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.”

- 1260 days = 3.5 years (see note above).
- There is much speculation as to who these two witnesses are. Futurists tend to picture two Elijah-like characters appearing who can perform magnificent miracles on behalf of God. However, the two witnesses may be symbolic and refer back to Deuteronomy 19:15 where one witness is not enough to establish a matter: two or three are needed. Jesus sent out the first disciples 'in twos' which also may be in mind here as well.

¹³ Ezekiel 40:3; Ezekiel 40:6; Zechariah 2:1; Amos 7:7-9

- Taking a preterist approach, it's more likely that this represents the witness of the church in Jerusalem. Incredible miracles were performed throughout the book of Acts and there is further clues to what they represent in the next few verses...

⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

- John is referencing Zechariah here:

"I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. ³ And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left." Zech. 4:2

"What are these two branches of the olive trees, which are beside the two golden pipes from which the golden oil is poured out?" ¹³ He said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." ¹⁴ Then he said, "These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth." Zech. 4:12-14

- John quotes Zechariah directly when he states 'these are the two anointed ones who stand before the Lord of the whole earth' (referring to the two witnesses). In his commentary on this chapter of Zechariah, John Calvin believes that the golden lampstand represents God's church. We have already seen this imagery in Revelation 2&3 where Jesus stands amongst the lampstands.
- In terms of the olive tree, when it is used symbolically in Scripture it almost always represents 'true' Israel (see Romans 11:17-27 & Jer. 11:16-17). Leading up to Revelation, the Jewish Church had grown up in Jerusalem, meeting in the temple, numbering tens of thousands with Levites and priests joining them. This church then evangelised the Roman world leading to many churches being planted in Gentile cities– including the seven churches in Revelation 2&3. The olive trees and lampstands therefore represent the Jewish and Gentile expressions of the 'church'. They are God's witnesses of Earth (John 15:27).

⁵ And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. ⁶ They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may 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 kind of plague, as often as they desire. ⁷ And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, ⁸ and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.

"In Jewish thought it was a terrible thing that a body should not be buried. When the heathen attacked God's people, to the Psalmist it was the greatest tragedy of all that there was none to bury them (Psalms 79:3); the threat to the disobedient prophet, a threat which came true, was that his carcass would not come to the sepulchre of his fathers (1 Kings 13:22)". - Barclay

- Both the 'beast that rises from the bottomless pit' and the 'great city' are explained in more detail in chapter 17

- *'symbolically called Sodom and Egypt'* - both Sodom and Egypt had been places that God's people had to flee from because judgment reigned down (Lot fleeing Sodom and the Israelites fleeing Goshen). Now, the church has to flee Jerusalem because judgment will reign down. This occurred in AD 70 when Tiberius sacked Jerusalem and copied the Greek King, Antiochus Epiphanes by sacrificing a pig on the altar of the temple. This time the temple was completely destroyed – brick by brick (as prophesied by Jesus in Matthew 24).

⁹ For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, ¹⁰ and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹ But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. ¹² Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them,

- The three and a half days is representative of the time, times and half a time and is present in various forms through the Book of Revelation. This is referencing the desolation of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes and the resultant Maccabean rebellion which last 3.5 years. It was a low point in Jewish history because of the tribulation the Jews endured. That the witness are killed and lie dead for 3.5 days is symbolic of the great persecution that has seemingly decimated the church in John's time. But God revitalises the church and the church goes on to flourish.
- The witnesses are called to heaven – this is symbolic of those who were martyred during this time going to the throne room of God.

“Come up here!” And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. ¹³ And at 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.

- *'A tenth of the city'; 'seven thousand'* – In AD 70 the population of Jerusalem was approximately 70,000.¹⁴ A tenth of that would equal the seven thousand quoted.

¹⁴ The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.

7. Temple Worship

¹⁵ Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, 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 shall reign forever and ever.” ¹⁶ And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, ¹⁷ saying,

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographic_history_of_Jerusalem

“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
 who is and who was,
 for you have taken your great power
 and begun to reign.

¹⁸ The nations raged,
 but your wrath came,
 and the time for the dead to be judged,
 and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints,
 and those who fear your name,
 both small and great,
 and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.”

¹⁹ Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

- ‘ark of the covenant’ – while the ark that we know about was destroyed during the sacking of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, it was only ever a copy of the real ark in heaven (See Hebrews 8:5). Here we see it for the first time and it is symbolising that we have a covenant in place with God: that he will be our God and that his presence will always be with us.
- In some ways this brings us to the end of the first half of revelation. Andrew Wilson says that this half can be seen as a commissioning for John in an echo to Ezekiel’s commissioning and the next half reveals John’s prophetic message to the church.

John’s Commission	Ezekiel’s Commission
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appearance of Jesus in glory (Revelation Ch 1) • John falls face down (Ch 1) • John is given a message to the seven churches (Ch 2-3) • John sees the throne and living creatures (Ch 4) • John sees a scroll with writing on either side (Ch 5) • The scroll is eaten and tastes sweet (Ch 10) • John measures the temple with a reed (Ch 11) • The trumpet sounds and the temple is opened (11:19) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appearance of ‘one like a son of man’ (Ezekiel Ch 1) • Ezekiel falls face down (Ch 1) • Ezekiel is sent with a message to Israel (Ch 2) • Ezekiel sees the throne and living creatures (Ch 1, 3 & 10) • Ezekiel sees a scroll with writing on either side (Ch 2) • The scroll is eaten and tastes sweet (Ch 3) • Ezekiel measures the temple with a reed (40-41) • The glory of God returns to the heavenly temple (Ch 1 & 10)

Figure 8 Comparison between John’s commission & Ezekiel’s commission (adapted from notes from THINK 2019 (A Wilson))

Questions

Icebreakers (for group sessions)

- What's been a positive outcome for you from this pandemic? What's been a negative outcome?
- Have you witnessed or experienced anything supernatural occurring in your life? What happened?

Q1: The trumpet judgments are reminiscent of Joshua 6:4-5 where God's people were told to march and blow trumpets around the city of Jericho and then God brought them victory. For Joshua, obedience (in marching and trumpet-blowing) was essential for victory. Is there anything that you sense God is asking you to be obedient with at the moment? Alternatively, share a situation in the past where you have sense God ask you to be obedient. What was the outcome?

Q2: Judgment reveals what is already present. Waters turning to blood reveals that blood has been shed. Literal darkness (through solar eclipses) reveals a people in spiritual darkness. Part of God's judgment is to bring things into the open so that people can repent. Read Rev. 9:20-21, what was the people's response to God's judgment? Take a moment to pray for people you know who have hardened their hearts towards God currently. Ask God to soften their hearts so that they don't follow the people in Rev. 9:20-21.

Q3: John is told to eat a scroll given to him and it tastes sweet. He is ingesting God's word. Psalm 1:2 talks about delighting in God's Law. Do you enjoy reading the Bible? Is it something you can do regularly? If not, what could help you to read the Bible more regularly so that you can really ingest all that God has spoken already?

Q4: Rev. 11: 4 links the two witnesses to Zechariah chapter 4 (specifically verse 12). The imagery is that these witnesses give oil (the Holy Spirit) and light (lampstands hold candles) to the world. How is GodFirst doing as a community at connecting people to God's presence and in bringing light to the darkness? How could we improve? How could your Life Group assist with this?

Q5: In chapter 11, verse 19, the Ark of the Covenant makes an appearance. What do you remember about the Ark of the Covenant? What did it look like? What was it for? Why was it named the way it was? Read Hebrews 8:5. What does this tell us about this ark of the covenant that John is seeing? (Hint: the earthly ark got destroyed/lost after the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem). Does this have any significance for us today?