

Revelation - Before the seventh trumpet

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 December 2024

Preacher: Philip Wells

[0 : 00] When the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven say, Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down.

Just to interrupt, there are a lot of references to other parts of the Bible in this, so if you spot one, just keep it in your brain and we'll notice it a bit later, but there's lots of references, so carry on please Maria.

Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. It's me, is it?

And he saw by him who lives forever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it.

And the sea and all that is in it. And said, there will be no more delay. But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as announced to his servants, the prophets.

[1 : 19] Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more, go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.

So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, take it and eat it, it will turn your stomach sore, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.

I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it.

It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told you must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.

I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, go and measure the temple of God and the altar with its worshippers.

[2 : 33] But the court which is without the temple, leave out and measure it not, for it is given unto the Gentiles.

And the holy city shall they tread on the foot forty and two rams. And I will give power to my two witnesses and they will prophesy for one thousand two 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 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. 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. Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast comes up from the abyss, will attack them and overpower and kill them.

[3 : 55] I'm not sure where we are.

Verse 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.

For three and a half days, men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial.

The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on earth.

But after the three and a half days, a breath of life from God entered them and they stood on their feet and terror struck those who saw them.

[5 : 02] Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, come up here. And they went up to heaven in a cloud while their enemies looked on.

At that every heart, there was a severe earthquake. And the tent of the city collapsed. 7,000 people were killed in the earthquake.

And the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe has passed. The third woe is coming soon. The seventh angel sounded his trumpet. And there were loud voices in heaven which said, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ.

And he will reign forever and ever. And the twenty-four elders who were seated on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshipped God.

[6 : 07] Saying, We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the one who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.

The nations were angry and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead and for rewarding your servants, the prophets, and your people who revere your name, both great and small, and for destroying those who destroy the earth.

Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, pearls of thunder, an earthquake, and severe hailstorm.

Thank you very much. It's a fairly difficult passage, isn't it? So we could pray again for help, couldn't we? Dear Lord, we pray that you will so speak amongst us and as we converse with one another so you would be in this conversation so that we may be edified and not just confused, but encouraged in the Christian life.

Amen. Amen. Right. I don't know. Give it to Mark.

[7 : 36] You'll think of something. We're looking at this book just to remind ourselves it speaks in an unusual way. It's got an unusual way of speaking.

It's not like Paul's letters. It's not like the Gospels. And we had begun putting together a list of the sort of things to look out for. And up on here from last time we've got the fact that he uses symbolic numbers.

Did anyone notice any numbers in the reading? 1,260 days. 1,260 days, which turns out to be 42 months, which turns out to be three and a half years.

Okay. So why does he say it differently? I don't know. I've got a suggestion. But symbolic numbers. We had 7,000, which is another reasonably symbolic number, didn't we?

Symbolic things. Symbolic things. I think most of the things he says is through symbols. It's almost like a picture book, isn't it? So Jesus is a lamb and he is a lion as we were singing.

[8 : 43] We have a beast in this reading, didn't we? A beast from the abyss. We have a city which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt.

Well, those are actually two completely different places. But this city, it says figuratively. I looked it up. It says *nidmatikos*, which means spiritually.

He is taken in the spirit to have this revelation of what is happening behind the obvious appearances. And this city is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt.

So there's something symbolic going on there. We have a hearing versus seeing. I'm not sure whether that crops up in this section. And we have a thing about time.

That sequence in the book is not equal to time. So the fact that you find something, the next paragraph in the book, doesn't mean that it happened sequentially after the previous paragraph.

[9 : 51] So we have the four horsemen. It seems pretty clear that you don't say one horseman happened, he stopped. Then the next horseman, he stopped. Then they're sort of putting together a collage of things.

So time, sorry, that's what I rubbed out, isn't it? Sequence, literary sequence, sequence in the book is not equal to time.

See what I mean. He can rewind, go further on in the book and he can rewind, etc. And then I'd like to put this idea of a collage.

A collage is when children in primary school put together what they did on their holidays on a little picture. And the teacher says, let's stick them all up on the board and we'll see.

So it's just a complete collage, isn't it? These people went to France. These people played in the playground. These people have got a picture of making stuffed animals.

[10 : 59] These people have got a picture of doing skateboarding and they just put it all together. And that's what the class did on their holidays. It's just all put together. And I think what we have is, we're going to have more of this, but I think we've got a bit of a collage here.

Are you with me so far? So this is sort of recapping the way that he speaks. I think that's enough on the convention. Up on the screen behind me is a sort of so far.

This is a book for our edification. I know that people use the book to sort of get one over on us in saying, oh, we've discovered how prophecy is being fulfilled this moment.

It's a book for our edification. It's a book to help us survive as Christians and progress in the Christian life. Revelation means unveiling. Unveiling. So it's showing us the reality, the spiritual reality, the abiding reality behind what we see on the surface.

It's in the form of a letter which puts us in mind that it must have been relevant to the people who originally read it. Of course, that's what letters are like. It's in the form of a prophecy.

[12:13] Prophecy doesn't necessarily mean foretelling like a horoscope or something. It certainly says what is shortly going to happen.

It tells that. But it puts that in that big picture of what's going to happen and gives behavioral implications. If this is God's plan, this is how we should now be living.

That's the picture of all the different components just for what it's worth. And the repeated refrain at the beginning, to the one who overcomes.

This is meant to help us to be overcomers in the spiritual conflict in which all Christians are placed between the lamb and the serpent.

That's what we looked at the time before. It was the seven seals. And you remember there was a pattern. One, two, three, four. Five was different.

[13:16] It jumped straight to the end. And then it did a rewind. And then there was the conclusion like that. And then what we were looking at with the trumpets. One, two, three, four.

The whole ecosystem being hit. And then we had these rather unpleasant pictures of the demonic locusts and the attack of the cavalry.

So there's the locusts and there's the cavalry. The locusts come from the abyss. There's something demonic about them. And I thought actually as we looked into this, it was fairly grim actually.

I'm sorry it was grim, but that's just what it was. However, it's not the whole story because it goes to the glorious triumphant end which we read. We had so far described a world plagued by the dysfunction of creation of nature, torment of life without God, multiple issues of death and injury.

And I think Sirius Lewis was right when he commented on this sort of thing. He says, God whispers in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pain.

[14:30] Pain and suffering is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world. And I think the keynote for all of that was repent. Now, it says at the end of the chapter that we didn't read, but they still did not repent.

And that's a fairly grim summary, isn't it? However, we haven't yet done this important bit in the middle here. And that's what we're going to look at.

So there's this interlude or this insertion which we're going to look at. And I'm saying that it has these components. And the components make all the difference between the verse which says 921, they did not repent of their murders, magic, arts, sexual immorality or thefts.

It makes all the difference between that and the end of chapter 11. 7,000 people were killed in the earthquake and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

And that seems to me a much more positive outcome. Previously it says they were unmoved, they didn't repent. But at the end of chapter 11 it says when you take the whole thing into account, people give glory to the God of heaven.

[15:47] Now, I would say at least that is a hopeful note. There's a spiritual move there. People give glory to the God of heaven. So my question for this evening is what is it that gives hope into what would otherwise be a dark and grim situation?

And that's what I'd like us to be thinking about this evening. What is it that gives some hope into this situation? And don't say anything out loud, but have a look at that.

Because I think what it is, is that the presence of a community that... Don't say anything out loud, but just see what those words are.

And I think that's what this intermediate section is about. So what does section have? Chapter 10, verse 1. The first thing it has is an angel and a little scroll, which John eats and then he speaks.

It has a temple which gets measured. This is chapter 11. And a city which gets trampled. It has two witnesses. And I think the two form a duo, a team.

[17:06] And we'll say what they're like. And then at the end, there is this earthquake and glory given to God. So those are the components. So let's have a look at them in a moment.

So I did say, did anybody spot any biblical references as we went through? So let's just see what we've got. Mark? I spotted the eating of the scroll.

And I thought of Ezekiel. You had to eat the scroll, is that correct? Correct. Ezekiel eats a scroll. We'll look at that in a moment. And the lampstands are in Zechariah.

The lampstands are in the prophet Zechariah, Steve. I was thinking they're measuring the temple. I can't remember which prophet it was. Yeah. Yeah, there's a bit in Zechariah.

Go and measure the temple. No, hold on. Don't measure the temple. And there's a bit in Ezekiel where he measures the temple at great length. Which we will come to. Well spotted. Good.

Anything else?

[18:08] What about turning water into blood? Exodus. Who was it who turned water into blood? God. Well, God did, yes.

But through whom? Moses. Yeah, through Moses. And praying so that it doesn't rain? Elijah. Elijah did that, yes.

Plagues, verse 6. Plagues. Plagues would be? Exodus. Exodus, yeah. Moses. Sending presents to each other.

Where is that? That's in chapter 1110. Anybody know where it's sent? Yes? Yes, it is, isn't it? Now, who sends presents to each other in Esther? The Jews. I was a slave race in, I mean, towards the end.

Jim, Peter. Yeah, yes. Is it the Jews that send presents to each other? Or is it their enemies? I can't remember. But it's in Esther, isn't it?

[19:07] Well done. Who went up to heaven in a cloud? Well, Jesus did. And? Elijah.

Yeah, he went up actually in a whirlwind, didn't he? Yeah, well done. Well done. Lots of things like that. I think you've covered a large number of them.

So there's lots of references here. And I think we need to be drawing on those. So if those are, I'm not going to try and look everyone up in detail, I'm afraid, because there's so many threads that you could pull.

But John is capitalizing on people who know their Bible. And he's saying, this is what the prophecies and the history of the Hebrew scriptures is leading us all.

And here is everything combined together and fulfilled together in Christian things. Okay. Let's, that's what I'll put.

[20:11] There's loads and loads and loads of biblical references. Right. So let's go through this then. Let's go through the angel and the little scroll. Now, the scholars say there was a scroll before with seven seals, which I think is a vivlion.

And this is a little scroll, which is something like a vivlion or something like that. And some of them say, well, they're obviously two different things. And others say, well, it could be the same thing.

To me, it just seems a bit different. So I'm not going to try and make any connection. But just, just for you, we'd be aware there's other ways of reading it. So let's have a look at the angel.

So I saw another mighty, another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud and a rainbow was above his head.

His face was like the sun. His legs were like fiery pillars. He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand.

[21:13] He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land. He gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of seven thunders spoke.

Seven thunders. And I was about to write them down. But I heard a voice from heaven saying, seal up what the seven thunders have said.

And do not write it down. And then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them.

The earth and all that is in it. The sea and all that is in it. And said, there will be no more chronos. In the words does it say there will be no more time?

Delay. Yeah. The authorised version would say there's no more time. And people have taken that to mean time stops. You know, there's no such thing as time in heaven.

[22 : 10] I don't think that's what it means. I think it's a better translation to say there's no more time for anything else to happen. No more delay. So it's sort of saying God's purposes are moving forward.

But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, finished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets. So let's have a little think about this angel.

He says there's no more delay. What do his descriptions tell us? What do you think about the descriptions of him in those first few verses?

He's mighty. He's mighty.

Yeah, we're told he's mighty. We're told explicitly he's mighty. Yeah, a mighty angel. Yeah. There was a mighty angel before in 5 verse 2.

[23 : 08] I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice who is worthy to break the seals and open the scrolls. So this is another mighty angel if we take it at its face value.

Yeah. Anything else about this person? Is a rainbow symbolic of God's covenant? Is a rainbow symbolic of God's covenant? That seems to be the thing, doesn't it?

Yeah, that's a sort of, yeah, God's covenant. Yeah, anything else? He feels a bit more impressive than all the other angels we've interacted with so far. That's a very wise comment.

He feels more, what did you say? Impressive. Impressive, yes. He is impressive, isn't he? Could you enlarge on what makes him impressive? I think even if we were to come here with the other angel in 5 verse 2, it's an, I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, and then that's all we hear with the angel.

Yeah. First here we've heard that this is a mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was wrote in this. This is above his head. This is what his face is like. This is where his legs are. And even what the legs are like.

[24 : 14] And the fact that the legs are planted on, his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land. Something very all-encompassing about this one. So, like if there was a combination between a mighty angel and a mighty ear?

A mighty ear angel, yes. It's interesting, he's not, he's told, he says another mighty angel. So, from that it sounds like they're two of the same sort. But he's certainly very impressive.

Face shining like the sun, legs like fiery pillars. How impressive is that description? Very. Very. As impressive as?

It's almost like the description of the Lord Christ, isn't it? In the first chapter, his eyes were like blazing fire, his feet were like bronze growing in a furnace, his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.

One would be tempted to say that this is Christ. But it does say it's another angel. So, it's someone very, very much at home in the company of Christ, if you could say it like that.

[25 : 23] There's something very, very heavenly about this person. A mighty angel. So, I'm just going to stick with the angel that he's mighty and impressive, as he rightly said.

What do we learn from the mighty angel? He shouts. Mm-hmm. He shouts with the roar of a lion.

Yeah. And what does the roar of a lion tell us? Powerful. Powerful, yeah. Yes?

I think we learn quite likely less from the angel, because the angel has the, the voice is the same thing as the stuff that they shared. So, what was the first thing you said?

So, we learn, we don't want as much from this specific angel, because we're not, the information is shared, it's sealed up in the same. Correct. I think that's the thing. We learn very little from the angel, actually.

[26 : 23] Can we use the microphone, is what, is the point? Yeah. Yeah. I repeated what you said anyway, I think. We actually learn very little from the angel. He's got an impressive voice, like a lion, like thunders.

But when John says, okay, hold on, let's capture that, he's told, don't. Nope. Which is interesting. So, let's go now to what happens next.

The voice that I had heard from heaven, verse 8, told me one, I mean, he does say there will be no more delay. So, he does tell us that. And he does tell us that the mystery of God's purposes is moving on.

So, he does tell us that. But we don't know what the seven thunders said. So, it's quite limited what we learn from the angel. Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more. Take

the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land. And I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. And he said, take it and eat it. In your mouth it will be sweet as honey. It will turn sour in your stomach.

[27 : 30] So, I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth. When I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, you must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.

The about is the word which means upon. So, I'm inclined to say he's not talking about them but talking to them. You must prophesy over.

You must prophesy upon peoples, nations, languages and kings. I think that makes more sense. I think it's certainly a reasonable translation. So, what have we got?

It's a reference to Ezekiel. I think it is worth following this one up. Ezekiel 3, 1 to 6. This is the commissioning of Ezekiel.

Could you read it seeing as you've got the microphone? Ezekiel 3, 1 to 6. And he said to me, Son of man, eat what is before you.

[28 : 51] Eat the scroll. Then go and speak to the people of Israel. So, I opened my mouth and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said to me, Son of man, eat the scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.

So, I ate it and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth. He then said to me, Son of man, go now to the people of Israel and speak my words to them. You are not being sent to a people of obscure speech and strange language, but to the people of Israel.

Not to many peoples of obscure speech and strange language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I had sent you to them, they would have listened to you. Okay, thank you very much.

So, just to state the obvious, what is Ezekiel's profession? Or what is his line of work? He's a prophet. And this is the sort of symbolic way of him being commissioned as a prophet.

And would anybody like to just put into their own words what's going on here? This is the commissioning of a prophet. So, how does this work? Ready for the microphone?

[29 : 59] Anybody want to? Put this into their own words. Mark? Good mark. Good mark. Good mark. The Lord is sending Ezekiel as a prophet to speak his words to the people.

And they have to listen and obey him. Thank you very much. So, how does Ezekiel get the words of God? He eats the scroll.

Yeah, he eats the scroll. And what do you think eating... What do you think the idea of eating is in this case? Inwardly digest it.

Yeah, he inwardly digests it. So, it's not just like a newsreader who has it in front of him and just reads it. He actually takes it into himself. And what's his reaction as he takes it into himself?

It's sweet, isn't it? Yeah, there's a sweetness to it, isn't there? Now, which way round is it? Does it say anything about sour? Sour? Sour. It's just bitterness.

[31 : 01] I've lost the sour. Is there a sour in this bit? Make my stomach bitter. Verse 10. Verse 10. Sorry, I'm lost.

I'm sorry, I'm in Revelation. Yeah, in Ezekiel, does it say sour? I'm sorry, I'm looking at Revelation. I thought it was sour. No, in Ezekiel, in Ezekiel, the original one.

Does it have sour? I thought it did. It's just got the sweetness, has it? Okay, well, he takes it in and there's a sweetness to it.

And having taken it in, he then speaks it out. And what's different about the audience for Ezekiel and the audience for John?

Can we have the microphone over for Rosemary, please? Thank you. Well, Ezekiel is told to speak to the house of Israel, his own people.

[32 : 06] Yeah. And John is told to prophesy to many people, nations, languages and kings. Super. Yeah, thank you very much indeed. Absolutely spot on. So, the references to Ezekiel, if we also have Revelation open as well, it tastes sweet, it turns sour.

So, there's another angle to this. I'm just thinking of, like Paul, when he says, when I go to speak, to some wear the aroma of life, and to others wear the aroma of death.

It's not all good news. No, it's not all good news. It does depend on who's receiving it. And there's certainly a non-affirmatory aspect to it, doesn't it?

Because the gospel says you're a sinner. And you can't get away from that. You can't produce a gospel which just says, God loves you so much, you're wonderful. Which would be very affirming. But the gospel actually says, the love of God for sinners is such an amazing thing, because sinners are obnoxious, awful in the way they relate to God, and need to confess their sin and repent.

[33 : 19] Anyway, so there's a sweetness and there's a sourness. And he's told he must, is that right? You must prophesy. So, here's the picture of it.

There's the scroll. There's the guy eating it. And then he, in turn, speaks it out to kings and, what have we got?

Peoples, nations, languages, and kings. Any connections with this idea of speaking to peoples, nations, languages, and kings?

Any thoughts about that? I will give you a clue. I think the Book of Acts has some references to that. Can we have the mic for Jerome?

Paul needed to speak to magistrates and civil leaders. Yeah. And they, yeah.

[34 : 25] Was it Peter also? The kings of the earth and the rulers had taken counsel together against the Lord and his anointed.

And indeed, Herod and Pilate did get together. So, that would be before Paul came on the scene. Am I right in saying there's a, yes, Rosemary? Thank you. And Jesus' great commission in Matthew 28.

Yeah. Jesus' great commission to go to all nations. I'm thinking of the original mission of Israel to be a light to the Gentiles, which, of course, Israel failed to be.

But the servant, the suffering servant, is going to be a light to the Gentiles. And actually, Paul picks up on that in his own ministry and says, that's what I've been sent to do, to be a light to the Gentiles. To proclaim my name to kings, I think it says, and suffer much. I think that's what it says in Acts 9, 9, 16, when Paul learns what his ministry is going to be.

[35 : 38] Am I right in this? Acts 9. The Lord said to Ananias, go, this man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and the people of Israel, and I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.

So, that agenda of speaking into the whole wide world is super. Now, just, yes.

Can I ask a question? Sorry, this isn't appropriate. I froze it a little bit off, but I'm intrigued about this. I heard something recently about this whole matter of speaking about to nations.

And it's not such a big thing here in the UK, but in America, they have this kind of whole idea of Christian nationalism. Is the word nations here kind of synonymous with ethnicity?

Is it like ethnos? So, different ethnic groups. Or could you interpret this that actually this is the gospel going to nations as nations? And being transformed to be Christian nations?

[36 : 43] Or is that something being read too much into the text? Well, I can just in a moment tell you what the actual word is. So, we're in Acts 10, verse 11.

I've got the wrong... Acts. Acts 10. Acts 10, verse 11. No, not Acts.

Why am I doing Acts? I should be Revelation 10, shouldn't I? That's why I'm getting it all wrong. Revelation 10, verse 11. Yeah, it's ethnos, which is just a nation.

So, the fact that that's the word that's used doesn't really solve your question. I would have thought, in terms of the way this idea is used, the rest of the Bible, it's like Jesus says, you know, you go to all different nationalities.

Not meaning you go to the parliament and get them to put Christian laws, but you just go and evangelize Italian people and Welsh people.

[37 : 51] And, yeah, I think that's what it means. It's not turning the UK to a Christian nation. It's not about turning the UK to a Christian nation. It's not evangelizing. Yeah, yeah. I think, yeah. Yeah.

It does say it's good to kings as well. Yes, it does. Yeah. And at another point, he talks about kings from the greatest to the least. So, I think it includes kings, but it isn't just to kings, is it?

I mean, Paul wanted to speak to, wanted to go before Caesar, but he didn't only want to go before Caesar. Does that make sense? Yeah. So, I think what he's, the ingredient that he's put into the previous Grimm situation in this symbolic way is a prophesying.

And he uses the Ezekiel storyboard thing to describe this. And this is the way I'd like to go with this. He's talking, although he uses John as the example, the principle is that the thing that makes the difference to that Grimm situation is the prophesying of people who can prophesy, meaning to say speak the gospel into the international scene.

[39 : 15] And speaking the word that we've been given to the nations, there's a sweetness and a sourness to it. But as we've said, this is the mission Jesus gave to his church to go into all the world and preach the gospel, making disciples of all nations.

It's the mission of the church, and by extension, it's the mission of us. And we might say, why didn't God use the mighty, impressive angel?

But he didn't, did he? The mighty, impressive angel gave us very little information at all. The person who passes on the information is the person who's eaten the scroll and then speaks.

And that's us. If we've received God's word, he uses us. You get the same thing with Peter and Cornelius, don't you? There's a vision that Peter gets.

Cornelius gets the vision of an angel. And instead of the angel giving Cornelius the gospel, the angel and the vision contrive to get Peter to go to Cornelius.

[40 : 34] And Peter speaks the gospel. And I'm just thinking, in whatever situation that we're in, we might be saying, oh Lord, in terms of spreading the gospel, please send a mighty angel.

A mighty angel could surely do a much better job of evangelising my mum and dad than I can do. A mighty angel could do a much better job of evangelising my workmates than I can.

A mighty angel could do a much better job of speaking the word to my classmates than I can. And the Lord says, no, he can't. You're the one I'm going to use.

Mighty angels are no good at this. You're the one I'm going to use. And I think that is, on the one hand, challenging, but it's also encouraging, isn't it? Because the Lord says, mighty angels are great, but you're better at this.

You can do a better job than a mighty angel can for all their impressiveness. And I think that's really rather encouraging for us, isn't it? You just sort of think that one through. Lord, send a mighty angel.

[41 : 48] No, you're adequate for this job. I'm going to use you. And I think that's really an encouragement. I hope that is an encouragement anyway. Let's move on to the next bit.

The read like a measuring rod in chapter 11. Go and measure the temple of God and the altar with its worshippers. So let's work our way through this one.

So I've got a measurement. I've got a temple. And the measuring excludes the outer court, which has been given to the Gentiles.

So those are the temple, the altar, and the worshippers, which gets measured. But the outer court, which is trampled by the Gentiles, there's some Gentiles trampling the outer court.

That happens for 42 months. And you don't measure that. So there's this measuring thing going on.

[42 : 50] Now, yes? Microphone, yeah. Microphone, otherwise we can't. So presumably, Revelation was written before 70 AD because the temple was torn down in 70 AD.

Well, I hadn't thought about that. It certainly would make sense. Yes. Yeah, good thought. The prophetess of the temple.

Was it, was Ezekiel's measuring, was that after the destruction of the temple? Zechariah certainly is. Yes. Ezekiel is looking forward to a new temple.

And his measuring takes place after the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians. So maybe that negates that thought. Yes, I think. Yeah. I mean, John was very old when he wrote this, wasn't he?

It would have been after. It could. I don't know the answer. But it's a good thought. Maybe we can think about that and consider that.

[44 : 05] Yep, thank you. The trampled city. Hostile forces are allowed to trample God's world temporarily.

42 months. Does that sound like a long time or a short time? Long time. Okay, a long time. I listened to Sinclair Ferguson talking about this and he was saying 42 months sounds like a shorter time.

But anyway, I'm not sure whether I quite follow him on that, but I got an idea from him on the next thing. The idea of the trampling of God's possession.

There's a sort of permission thing here, isn't there? They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. It's a limited time. It's three and a half years, which we established before. This idea of hostile forces being allowed to do something for a limited time.

Can we look at some references? Ephesians 2, 1 to 5. Hostile forces in God's world.

[45 : 18] Where's the microphone at the moment? Could Mark read this Ephesians 2, 1 to 5? As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed

the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

Thank you. Oh, sorry. Yeah, carry on. Sorry. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

It is by grace you have been saved. Amen. Thank you. I thought that as an appropriate text reminds us that outside God's community is not neutral territory.

It's a trampled city where hostile forces occupy. And this is quite a blunt description, isn't it? Before you were a Christian, you followed the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work amongst those who are disobedient.

[47 : 01] That's quite a strong statement, isn't it? That people who are not Christians are not just neutral in a completely secular world. They are actually following a spiritual path under the dominion of a spiritual power.

It might, you know, if you read the papers, they won't say that. They'll just describe behaviors. But we're being told the truth behind this, that there is spiritual power at work.

And there is a kingdom of the air. And there's spiritual dynamics in the lives of people who are not Christians. So I link this with this idea of the trampled temple.

2 Corinthians 4.4. 3 Corinthians 4. Perhaps Mark could read that one again, please.

The God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the lights of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

[48 : 15] Thank you. Again, the God of this world, there's a spiritual power at work outside of the church, in the area of this world.

And in this case, it's a blinding effect to prejudice the minds of people who don't see the light of the gospel and the glory of Christ.

So I think that is conceivably relevant. And then 1 John 5.19, if Mark could read that one again, please. Thank you. We know that we are children of God and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

Thank you very much. I think under the control of is probably an over-translation. What it actually says, the whole world lies in the evil one. No, we mustn't think that the world is out of God's control and is solely under the control of the evil one.

But nevertheless, by permission, there is a sense in which the evil one has a strong influence, a captivating influence over people who are not yet Christians.

[49 : 48] Now, rightly or wrongly, I'm linking this to the trampled temple. I mean, the texts are true whether this is the correct link or not. So I'm saying maybe this reminds us not to have an over-optimistic view of the human condition.

I mean, there is God's common grace. People who are not Christians can try and do good things.

People who are not Christians can enjoy God's good gifts. We can learn things from people who are not Christians.

We can rejoice with them and weep with them. But bottom line, if they're not Christians, they are in the realm of the evil one and doing his will.

People can be noble and capable and precious, but hostile to God, caught in the tyranny of Satan, sin, lies, and the deep sin of irreverence towards the creator God.

So I think perhaps just as an application point, doesn't that make us want to pray for people who are not Christians?

[50 : 52] Does that make us want to have compassion on people who would want to be plucked as brands from the burning? And when we talk about the lost, that's not just a euphemism.

That's a serious, serious description of people who are without Christ. Let's move on. Thank you, Lord, for plucking me from the mire and pit of my sin.

Thank you for taking me from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of the one he loves. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Now let's go. So that's the bit that you don't measure that.

That's the trampled city. But you do measure the temple, the altar, and its worshippers. So I'll put a measuring.

It happens in Zechariah 2, which I don't know how quickly we can do this. There's always such a lot to cover. And when you've run out of concentration, just look as though you're really bored and I will

stop.

[52 : 07] Zechariah 2 is one of these rewind type things. Zechariah 2. Zechariah 2. So I looked, and there before we was a man with a measuring line in his hand.

He said, and I asked, where are you going? He said, to measure Jerusalem, to find out how wide and long it is. And then the angel who was speaking to me was leaving. Another angel said, no, no, no. Run and tell that young man.

Jerusalem would be a city without walls because of the great number of people and animals in it. And I myself will be a wall of fire around it. So that's a sort of aborted measurement.

But another classic measurement text is Isaiah 40. And if you Google Sinclair Ferguson, Revelation 11, he has a very succinct and wonderful description of this, which I will try and emulate imperfectly. So I'm just trying to find Ezekiel. Ezekiel 40. I'm sorry, did I say the wrong thing?

[53 : 20] I meant Ezekiel 40. This is the measuring one. So he's looking forward to a new temple, which is a glorious temple.

It transcends the bricks and mortar temples. It is totally splendid. And he says, this is how he describes it. Ezekiel 40.

In the 25th year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, the 10th of the month, in the 14th year, after the fall of the city, on that very day, the hand of the Lord was upon me.

He took me there. In visions of God, he took me to the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain. On the south side were some buildings that looked like a city. He took me there and I saw a man whose appearance was like bronze.

He was standing in the gateway with a linen cord and a measuring rod in his hand. The man said to me, son of man, look carefully, listen closely and pay attention to everything I'm going to show you.

[54 : 19] That is why I brought you here. Tell the people of Israel everything you see. And he goes around and measures everything. He's measuring things in verse 5. I haven't underlined it, so I can't really tell you.

But he goes around and measures everything. And the measurements are just colossal and stupendous. And the thing that he's measuring is not the existing temple, like a building surveyor, but the visionary future temple where God will dwell gloriously.

It's not like, it's not an earthly city. It's a visionary spiritual city. And this is the city where God truly dwells.

Which is in Ezekiel 43, 1-5, where the glory of God comes to dwell in this temple. And I would like to connect it this way and say that the place where God dwells, and it will be in the heavenly city, but currently God dwells amongst us.

And did we read this? I think we read this recently. The Ephesians 2. Ephesians 2, 19-22 says Perhaps Where's the microphone at the moment?

[56 : 04] Could Jerome read it, please? Ephesians 2, 19-22 So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him, you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Yeah. That's a fantastic thing about the Christian community, isn't it?

It's one of the things about why we don't do the Christian life on our own. We do it together. And the community is built together and a place where God, a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Isn't that a wonderful thing? It's almost too much to believe, isn't it? That God would dwell amongst us. That as we come together and live together and serve together and worship together, God says that, I would like to be with those people.

I want to be in the midst of those people. I think it's such a precious and amazing and wonderful and encouraging thing that the temple is us.

[57 : 30] And the measuring. So I never quite thought about this. When you measure something like this, it's a little bit like counting something, isn't it?

We don't have change in our pockets nowadays, do we? We might have change in our handbags, I don't know. But you might take it out and you count it.

This is my money. Look at how much I've got. Five pounds fifty. That's all mine. You count your precious possessions.

You measure your precious possessions. And God says, measure this temple, including the people in it, the altar, the whole thing.

Measure it. I'm trying to find a neat way of saying this. God's saying, this is my property. This is my treasured possession.

[58 : 40] What have I got? I've got this. And it's a way of God saying that he values us. Measure.

Count them. Look at them. There they are. My people. Measure that. Write it down. Be pleased with it. These are my people.

This is my possession. And I think there's an encouragement there, isn't it? That God's prepared to say, yeah, these are my lot. Yeah. God's solid foundation stands firm.

The Lord knows those who are his. They're mine. Says God. I measured them. I wrote them down. I counted them.

Yeah. Okay. Let's swiftly move on to the two witnesses. Now, I'm going to lean hard on the idea of symbolism here because I think we've learned that John just loves to speak symbolically.

[59 : 47] We've got these two witnesses. And they are prophesying, verse 3, for how long? 1,260 days.

1,260 days. So here they are prophesying. And they are like. Or no, it doesn't say they're like. They are. Verse 4, what are they?

And? The two olive trees and the two lampstands. Now, time doesn't allow us, I don't think, to delve into the origin. It's in Zechariah.

This is looking after the exile. It's when the people of God are being rebuilt. They've lost a lot.

They're being rebuilt. And the idea of what this returned people is supposed to be like is the sort of thing that Zechariah is talking about.

And the vision, which is a vision in the original prophecy, is of two olive trees. Olive trees produce what? Olives and olive oil.

[60 : 56] Olive oil. And in the original prophecy, there are two lamps. They're oil lamps. So they would look like that. They'd have a wick sticking out of them. And in the original prophecy, and I could tell you what it was if you wanted to have one finger in there just to check what I'm trying to say in this rather quick way.

It is. It's Zechariah chapter 2. No, it isn't. Oh, I haven't even written it down.

I've probably got it on this one. Thank you very much. Zechariah 4.3. The two olive trees have pipes leading to make sure that the lamps don't go out.

So there's a constant feeding of olive oil so the lamps don't go out. Do you have a son? Give me oil in my lamp. Keep me burning. Okay, hold that thought.

And these lamps, they're there to give light. So they're light-giving, fed by oil. They don't go out. And the two witnesses are likened to this vision of, I would say, light-spreading communities, the returned exiles.

[62 : 18] They've got two leaders, Joshua and Sir Robbale, I think it is. But I think it goes wider than just these two people. They're light-giving communities.

You know, what does he say? A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. You are the light of the world. That's what he says. Jesus is the light of the world. Then he says to us, you are the light of the world.

And these two witnesses fit this picture that I've got up on the screen here. Two witnesses reminds us of what function in the law or what provision in the law.

In the law of Moses, I mean. Two witnesses? To establish guilt. Yeah, or to establish the truth of the matter, shall we say. Yeah, you need two or three witnesses.

So, you've got two. That's the number for a sure testimony. Prophets tend to come in pairs. Elijah and Elisha.

[63 : 25] Moses and... I was going to say Moses and Joshua. John the Baptist and Jesus. Pairs seem to occur, but we've got here two witnesses.

And if you think back, witnessing in Revelation, in the book of Revelation, witness means the same thing as testimony. Martyr is the word that comes from that. And Jesus is described as the faithful witness.

And the overcomers overcome by the blood of Jesus and the word of their testimony. So, this idea of witnessing is a really deeply embedded in the ideas of the book of Revelation.

And Sinclair Ferguson says, of the 1,260 days... Do you think that's a long time or a short time? I think that's a short time.

He says long. He says if you count out 1,260, it sounds a lot longer than 42. Although it's the same time. He says, and they are witnessing day in, day out.

[64 : 32] Day in, day out. Day in, day out. And here are the witnesses who make all the difference in this grim situation to turn it from a...

They never repented to a gave glory to the God of heaven. And what happened? These witnesses... I've got... I heard it there all the time. These witnesses are shining out into the world. Constantly supplied by the Spirit. And they witness day in, day out. Day in, day out. For 1,260 days. And I think that's an encouraging picture for us, isn't it? What makes the difference in this world? It's faithful witnesses who will just be consistent in their life and testimony day in, day out.

Day in, day out. For 1,260 days or however many days the Lord has for us. And just think of whatever your situation is.

[65 : 44] God portrays a difference being made in a grim situation by faithful witnesses who stick to that testimony.

Who are depending on the Lord for his supply. And they do so day in, day out. Day in, day out. And that can be us, can't it?

And there's lots of other things that we could say. I should probably stop, shouldn't I? There's lots of other descriptions of these witnesses. And I think we should take them as being likenesses.

The witnesses are like Moses. They are like Elijah. I think I need to go through these. They are people whose prayers are powerful.

They are like, they are even like Jesus. And in some sense, they are indestructible. Verse 5, if anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies.

[66 : 56] This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. So they're indestructible. Nobody can get to them. However, in almost the same breath, verse 7, when they finish their testimony, the beast that comes up from the abyss will attack them and overpower them.

So they're indestructible. All the time God wants them to be witnessing, when their job is done, they're as flimsy as anything. Is there any example of that?

I'm just thinking. You'd imagine it's something that John Wesley might have said. I'm indestructible until my mission is finished.

I'm sure Chris Fry would have said that. You know, that I'll be here witnessing until my job is over. And then I'm as vulnerable as anybody.

And here are these witnesses. They're a mixture of all sorts of things. There's a vulnerability. There's a power. And there's a vulnerability. They're disgraced and despised.

[67 : 59] But they have great power. And there's a mixture of strength and weakness. It's a little bit like what Paul says about himself in 2 Corinthians, where he says of his ministry, we're such a strange mixture.

This apostolic ministry in 2 Corinthians 4, verse 7, where he says, It's treasure in jars of clay. We're hard pressed on every side, but we're not crushed.

We're perplexed, but we're not in despair. We're persecuted, but not abandoned. We're struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

And there's this paradoxical mixture of weakness and strength, of fragility and power, of life and death. And I think this is something of what this chapter is showing us.

[69 : 17] It's borrowed strength in felt weakness. And the result is people give glory to God. That's the thing that makes the difference.

A prophetic group of people, which receives and internalizes God's word, and then speaks it out, and does so day in, day out, depending on the power of the Holy Spirit, that means they're people of prayer, strengthened with borrowed power in the midst of felt weakness.

And God would prefer to use these people rather than a hundred mighty angels. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Now then, shall we just close in prayer, or would you like to sing something?

Amen.