

SUMMER 4 - Glimpses of Glory

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[0 : 0 0] We give you thanks, Jesus, that the price is paid. Worthy are you, for you died for us. Amen.

We've had six trumpets so far. The first four you may remember were to do with cosmic destruction, earthquakes and the sky turning black and so on.

All of them were about limited judgment. God judging just a third of the world and a third being destroyed. A third, a third all the time, limited by God.

And then we briefly saw at the end of last week the fifth and the sixth trumpets. This time not so much cosmic upheaval but rather attacking those people who were not sealed by God.

That is attacking people who aren't Christians. The first or the fifth trumpet, the first of those last two we saw, was to do with torture and torment.

[1 : 0 4] Analogy of a plague of locusts coming to destroy. But not kill, just torture. And then the sixth trumpet where we finished last week, a third of those people who are not sealed by God being killed.

We saw that it's God's judgment on those who are persecuting God's people. It's not the end time exactly but rather a warning for the end.

A last chance if you like before the end comes. The last chance for people to repent and to turn back to God. But as we saw at the end of chapter 9, a warning that's not heeded by and large.

People not repenting, not turning back to God. And rather staying in their idolatry and their immorality. Six trumpets gone, one to go.

But as with the seven seals, there's a gap. Chapter 7 was a gap between the sixth seal and the seventh.

[2 : 0 6] If you like a delaying tactic. In part to create suspense. But it's I guess more than that as well. But the same pattern comes here. Six trumpets down and now the gap.

Chapter 10 through to halfway through chapter 11. Before at the end of chapter 11, the seventh trumpet sounds. In the first interlude in chapter 7.

Between the sixth and the seventh seals. There were two pictures. One of the 144,000. And one of the multitude that nobody could number. Picture of the same thing from different angles as we saw.

And now we also get two pictures in the interlude. It's a little commercial break of two commercials. The bitter scroll. And the two witnesses. The bitter scroll comes first in chapter 10.

There's a mighty angel from heaven. John sees at the beginning of chapter 10. Robed in a cloud with a rainbow above his head. Face like the sun and legs like pillars of fire.

[3 : 0 8] Rather astonishing figure. Some think it's so astonishing it must be talking about Jesus himself. And though there are some similarities with the picture of the angel. And with other pictures of Jesus in Revelation.

It's clear that it's not. Nowhere is Jesus called just an angel. He's always given much, much more importance than that. But this is a fairly astonishing angel.

And John sees it from this point of view or the standpoint of earth. From chapter 4 to now, John's in heaven. Even though from heaven he sees things on earth. But now he's on earth because he sees coming from heaven.

This angel. This mighty angel. The rainbow we've seen already was a symbol of God's faithfulness. Way back in Genesis 9. Remember at the end of the flood story.

God set up a rainbow. So that God would remember that he'd never bring about a flood. As he had done then. To destroy the world. And now comes the sign of the rainbow.

[4 : 07] It's a great encouragement the sign of the rainbow. Especially when you get all these cosmic pictures. Because it's a reminder that in all the upheaval. Of the cosmic upheaval that we've already seen and yet to see in the book.

God will not destroy things like he did at the flood. That's a great encouragement. We might think God might have reneged or forgotten that promise. But the rainbow is there and it reminds us that God is faithful.

And the cloud is often a symbol of the end times judgment. Jesus will come on a cloud at his second coming to judge the world. And maybe the cloud here is meant to symbolize something of that as well.

And the legs of this mighty angel were like pillars of fire. I think it's better to use the expression pillars of fire than just fiery pillars. Because remember when Israel came out of Egypt.

And went through the 40 year period in the wilderness. How were they guided by God? At night. Pillars of fire. And I think as I've shown each of the last three weeks. And again we'll see even more so tonight.

[5 : 06] The background of the imagery in the book of Revelation. Is the Old Testament. If we understand our Old Testaments well. Then we're well ahead in trying to understand the book of Revelation.

So what we get here is a mixture of symbols coming out of the Old Testament. God's faithfulness seen in the rainbow. God's guidance and providence seen in the pillars of fire.

God's judgment seen in the cloud as well. Or maybe the cloud is not meant to be judgment. But also the guidance there in the wilderness time. God is faithful to his covenant promises.

That's what we'll see tonight. He's keeping the promises that he made early in the Bible. As indeed he was keeping them all through the time of the Old Testament. And through the time of Jesus life as well.

And now at the end of history. God will be bringing about the fulfillment of all the promises that he's ever made. To his people. This angel was holding a little scroll.

[6 : 03] Not the scroll that Jesus went up to God's right hand to take. But it's a little scroll. And it's open. And it's open. He planted his right foot on the sea.

And his left foot on the land. Well it's a bit hard to be exactly sure what that meant to symbolize. Maybe it's his sovereignty or God's sovereignty over all things.

Sea and land. As a sort of summary of all the creation. Certainly though the picture is of a massive angel. An enormous figure. Standing on this world in effect.

I think it's meant to be a picture of encouragement. If you were a tiny little church in the Roman Empire. What an encouragement to see an angel from God that is so massive.

Straddling sea and land. Maybe it's a picture in contrast to the rebellion against God. Remember that the previous chapter ended with a picture of the idolatry and the immorality of those who oppose God.

[7 : 04] And this is saying that far greater than their rebellion and their power. Is the power of God represented in this massive angel. He gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion.

So often again in the Old Testament the lion's roar is a symbol for God speaking. In Amos 3 for example. And in many of the other prophets as well. And when he shouted the voices of the seven thunders spoke.

We've already seen a number of things that occur in Revelation seven times. It's a key to the symbolism of the book. It shows us that the book is artistically structured. Seven things happen.

Seven of this and seven of that. And now we get seven thunders. And if you remember last week I explained the fact that when you get to the seventh of a series. The seventh introduces the next seven in a series.

So when we got to the seventh seal it introduced the trumpets. And we begin a new series. Sort of like those Russian dolls that you take off. And there comes another one. And you take that off and there's another one.

[8 : 06] And that's a sort of a bit like what's happening here. When you get to the seventh you unpack it. And a new series of seven begin. But one of the most tantalizing things about these seven thunders.

Is that we're not told what they were. Or what they said. Or what they look like. At all. In fact verse four says that John was about to write. And presumably John is under the instructions back in chapter one.

Write down everything you see and hear. He's about to write. But then he hears this voice from heaven say. Seal up what the seven thunders have said. And do not write it down.

Well. The intrigue has to remain. So many people over the ages have tried to tell us what the seven thunders were. Seems to me that's absolute folly.

Maybe we can make some guesses. We're actually not meant to know. The sealing up of them tells us that there is knowledge here. That John has seen and heard. But we are not to know what it is.

[9 : 08] Whatever the reason is. We're not to know. Which is a great warning for us as Christians. Especially when we come to the book of Revelation. But not only there as well. That we come so in humility.

We don't know everything. God deliberately makes us not know everything. He reserves knowledge for himself. Maybe we'll know at the final day.

Maybe we'll get a chance in heaven to ask God all the things that I've been longing to ask him. Who wrote Hebrews? And all this sort of thing. But the point is this.

God tells us sufficient. God tells us enough. He tells us all we need to know. And if there are things we don't know.

And there are plenty. We don't need to know them. That's a very important thing to get in mind. Because there are many, many unanswered questions.

[10 : 05] But in the end they're not that important. The important things are told to us by God. It's very important when we come to the Bible as we struggle with little things that are problems.

Someone was mentioning to me last week. A friend of theirs was having problems with the fact that one of the Gospels seemed to say something slightly different to another Gospel. Maybe a contradiction.

Maybe not. In the end I think we have to plead some ignorance on some of these things. Some of the solutions to these questions are quite ingenious.

But we must come with humility. And recognizing some ignorance. It doesn't mean that we can't know God. It doesn't mean that we can't be sure about God. Because he's told us all we need to know.

And that is sufficient. Thunder is usually a sign for judgment. So maybe this is another sequence of judgment.

[11 : 07] The quiz, we don't know why it was withheld from us. Some people suggest that it's to show that it's too late for any more warning. The time for delay, as we're about to be told, is over.

And maybe God has withdrawn from us the knowledge of this cycle. Or even withdrawn the cycle itself. In order to say the delay is over. It's now time for the end.

But that's just speculation. We don't know. And we probably won't. But we don't need to know. Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven.

He's about to become inaugurated as the President of the United States or whatever. He's swearing an oath. That's what he's doing as people today raise their right hand and swear oaths. 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. It's a very solemn oath. Swearing by the God who is all of those four things.

[12 : 14] And the voice comes, there will be no more delay. In Daniel chapter 12, one of the key books of the Old Testament for understanding revelation and some of its symbolism.

There is a similar angel who also swears an oath. But in the context of that angel and that oath, it's very significant that we're told that until these things happen, there will be a delay.

It doesn't use the word delay. It says there will be a time and times and half a time, meaning probably three and a half years or three and a half times or periods of time. The implication is the end is coming, but there's a delay before it comes.

And now in the light of that, and in the light of that delay to Daniel, John is saying there is no more delay. The end is coming. The delay is over. The delay, remember, has been for the chance for people to repent.

Consistently in the New Testament, not only in Revelation, the fact that Jesus is yet to come is because God is allowing time for people to turn to him. That's why he's not come.

[13 : 23] 2 Peter 3 says that thing. And other passages as well. The reason for God's delay, so called, is because of his kindness in allowing people time to repent.

That's what we saw at the end of last week as well. But of course we saw there that people didn't repent and didn't turn to God. And now in the hardness of their hearts, perhaps God is saying there's no point in delaying.

They refuse to turn to me. They refuse to repent of their sins. And therefore there's no point in delaying any longer. It's not as though God is harsh in cutting short the time.

It's rather that people have ignored the time and turned away. There's no point in delaying any further. People have had their chance and they've refused to take it.

Now certainly as far as the book of Revelation goes, it seems there's a lot more things to happen. If the delay were literally over, then the end of the book would be now, virtually. But there indeed is a lot more yet to come.

- [14 : 26] But one of the things that this is saying is that in God's view, in God's perspective, the delay is over, the end times are here. And it's God's perspective that we need to see.
- Because running through the book of Revelation is this almost a contrast between God's way of seeing things and the world's way of seeing things. And the world's way of seeing things is that God, the church, the gospel is weak and impotent and defeated.
- But God's way of seeing things is that it's triumphant. And that's the way we ought to see things. We ought to have heavenly minded eyes to see. And in God's perspective, there is no delay.
- And maybe the statement there is now no more delay here in verse 6 of chapter 10 is in part an answer to the martyrs who cried out in chapter 6. If you remember back a fortnight. How long, O Lord?
- And now the answer comes, no more delay. The six trumpets represented every opportunity for people to turn to God.
- [15 : 30] Every form of calamity and catastrophe for this world, this universe, this cosmos was there. All to stimulate people to turn to God. And they refused.
- And the torture and the killing that came on a third as a warning to turn to God was also refused. And now there's no point in any further patience.
- Notice also that this oath is sworn to him or by him who lives forever and ever. That's God. It stresses that God lives forever.
- Which is a very encouraging thing to have in here for people who are facing death. No doubt many of the Christians who would have read the book of Revelation had lost friends, pastors, leaders of their church, family members who are Christians because of their faith.
- And to know that God lives forever is a great encouragement. Because if he didn't, what hope would there be beyond death? Death would be the end. But rather you see God lives forever.
- [16 : 43] And therefore any hope beyond death, which is in fact a real hope, is a certain hope because God lives. And it's stressed in this oath in verse 10 that God is the creator of all.
- The heavens, the earth and the sea. Summing up every possible thing that's been made. Stressing the creative power of God. Nothing is beyond his power. And therefore he is powerful to accomplish what he says will happen.
- It's reinforcing for the reader and the hearer of this word. The fact that God is powerful. And that he lives. But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet.
- Almost sounds like there's a delay there. The mystery of God will be accomplished. Just as he announced to his servants the prophets. What's the mystery of God?
- In the New Testament, almost without fail, the mystery of God is in fact the gospel. God saving us through the death and resurrection of his incarnate son.
- [17 : 51] It's not really a mystery. But it sort of was a mystery in the Old Testament. I mean God had announced his purposes and intentions. But exactly how he was to accomplish that was unclear.
- For the people in the Old Testament, they had to sort of peer dimly into the distance. It was a mystery. It wasn't quite revealed totally. But when Jesus came, it was revealed.
- It was made clear. The gospel was no longer a hidden mystery. But rather a revealed mystery. And indeed at the end of time when Jesus comes again.
- Any last things which remain hidden or not revealed will be revealed. Now the point of saying that and emphasizing it is to remind us that what we get in the Old Testament is the gospel.

It's not some other method that then is sort of superseded and done away with when the gospel begins at Bethlehem. The gospel began in the beginning of the Bible.

[18 : 51] And the Old Testament is about the gospel as is the new. The Old Testament, yes, dimly. Yes, many things that are unexplained, not explained or revealed until you get to the new.

But there is a consistency of purpose and design from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation. If we as Christians are to read our Bibles correctly, then we need to recognize that fundamental continuity between the Old Testament and the new.

Time and time again, scholars have tried to oppose the two, separate the two. One church theologian of the second century AD didn't like the Old Testament very much.

So he got rid of it from his Bible. And therefore he had to get rid of everything else in the New Testament that referred to the old. And he thought Luke referred to it too much. And so did Paul a bit. And he wasn't left with very much of the New Testament at all.

But you see, the New Testament is full of the Old Testament. I doubt that there is a page or a column in our Bibles that is not full of some allusion or reference or quote to the Old Testament.

[19 : 56] And always it is about the consistency of God's purpose. That he is consistent in beginning and bringing about the conclusion of what he's begun.

The mystery of God will be accomplished. Verse 7 says, just as he and the word that's translated in the NIV is announced. But the word literally means to evangelize. That's the word.

In fact, literally in Greek, it's the word evangelize. So it's not just so much an announcement of something, but it's the evangelizing. It's the proclaiming of the gospel. That's what the word evangelize is about.

The gospel is the evangelion or evangel. So it's the proclamation of the gospel that was made to the prophets at the end of verse 7. And I think that means the Old Testament prophets rather than any New Testament prophets.

Because what's going on in this chapter and chapter 11 is showing a consistency of prophecy from Old to New Testament culminating in John's revelation. We read in Galatians 3 that the gospel was preached to Abraham.

[21 : 02] And if you look at the story of Abraham, you don't find Jesus Christ's name mentioned or the crucifixion or justification by faith. But the gospel's there because Abraham is encouraged and exhorted to trust God and trust his promises.

What's happening, you see, that's being indicated in this verse is that all the events of revelation are the fulfillment of the promises of God made back at the beginning of the Bible.

In Genesis 12, for example, to Abraham. All that God had purposed for the universe, which is accomplished through the blood of the Lamb, as we saw in the first week of this series, is now being brought to fulfillment.

One purpose runs through history. It is the purpose of the gospel. To save the world, people, the universe, through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

And this link to Old Testament prophecy is very important for understanding what's going on here and indeed in the whole of Revelation. Remember that the imagery of the book of Revelation is Old Testament imagery almost exclusively.

[22 : 14] Amos said, surely the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants, the prophets. That's important for understanding John's role in all this. John is seen as an Old Testament prophet, if you like, or in the line of Old Testament prophecy.

And God is revealing things to him, which he is announcing to those who would read his word. 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. It's the voice of Jesus, the voice that John heard in chapter 1 and again in chapter 4.

So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. Imagine if you were John going up to this enormous angel who's straddling sea and land. Suppose he's by one foot on the land.

Maybe he's in a little boat by the other foot on the water. But he goes up to him and he says, and he takes the scroll. If you know your Old Testament, you'll see Old Testament statements there.

[23 : 30] In fact, Old Testament prophecy there. Ezekiel, for example, had the same sort of command. Take a scroll and eat it. And on your lips or in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.

Jeremiah, the same sort of thing. Psalm 119, not prophecy, but in the Psalms, talks again about the word of the Lord being as sweet as honey in our lips and so on.

For Ezekiel and in part for Jeremiah, it's part of their commissioning as a prophet to take a scroll and eat it, symbolizing the internal digestion of God's word so that in a sense what comes out of you will be God's word as the prophet's role is to speak the word of God.

And so here we have perhaps a commissioning or recommissioning of John in his ministry as a prophet. But as we'll see, it's a bit more significant than that as well. So Ezekiel's scroll was as sweet as honey, but John's is a bit different.

It's as sweet as honey also on the lips like Ezekiel, but in the stomach it will be sour. Prophecy here is basically the proclamation of God's word.

[24 : 38] Nothing magical about it. That's basically what's being described here. And this is saying that the proclaiming of God's word is a bittersweet affair. Yes, there is a sweetness because there is nothing sweeter than the gospel to announce to the world that God freely saves us from our sins by his extraordinary grace, which by us is unmerited and undeserved, is the sweetest thing we could say or hear, that God accepts us as we are, purely by the death of Jesus.

But there is a bitterness about it because the preaching of the gospel arouses opposition. It threatens people's pride, their self-sufficiency and security.

And therefore it builds up their opposition to Jesus Christ, producing bitterness in response. But more than that, the gospel goes on to proclaim that we are saved and therefore justified, declared innocent by God.

And on the last day, we will know, we'll be able to stand before the judgment seat of Christ and plead God's mercy and know that we will be acquitted by him. But for those who don't know that, judgment day is a fearful event.

There is a bitterness in preaching the gospel because not everyone will receive it and be saved. Not everyone will turn in repentance and faith. Yes, there is nothing sweeter than the gospel, but the sadness is that not all respond to that sweet medicine.

[26 : 26] God's word, you remember, has two sorts of sides to it. As Paul said in 2 Timothy 3, yes, it's to train in righteousness and teach very positive things, but it's also to rebuke and correct things that we don't like to be done to us.

This is saying that the servant of God, the prophet of God, the speaker for God has a fairly difficult job. It's sweet, but also bitter.

And the task of the preacher, the speaker for God, the servant of God, is that they have to speak God's word whether it's palatable or not. So often, those who are given the gospel chicken out or change it because they want to make it more palatable to an unbelieving world.

When the unbelieving world sets the agenda for the gospel, the Christian church has lost it all. Jeremiah was a prophet who knew what it was like.

He said these things, O Lord, you have enticed me and I was enticed. You've overpowered me and you have prevailed. I've become a laughing stock all day long.

[27 : 45] Everyone mocks me. For whenever I speak, I must cry out, I must shout, violence and destruction. For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long.

If I say I will not mention him or speak any more in his name, then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones.

I am weary with holding it in and I cannot. Jeremiah had eaten the scroll. It was sweet for him.

But he found its bitterness because it meant that he had to preach judgment to an unbelieving and idolatrous and immoral world. They mocked him.

They derided him. They threw him in a cistern to die. And yet in effect there he's saying, I cannot stop preaching the gospel because it is burning within me.

[28 : 45] And that's the same picture that John has here. It's the same as Paul had when he said, Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. He was compelled by the love of Christ to preach the gospel.

And he would face derision and the beatings and the scourgings and in the end the death all for the sake of the gospel. It's the same for John. But John's message here is not so much about John himself but it's an encouragement to the church to preach the gospel.

Keep on preaching it. Yes, it will be sweet on your lips but bitter in your stomach because you preach it to an unbelieving and immoral and mocking world. But preach it.

You can do no other. And that's the message for the church today because it's a message for the church in any age. We preach the gospel. We must preach it. We can only preach it.

And yes, we'll be mocked and derided because people will think it's stupid and foolish. But what did Paul say? Yes, it's the foolish thing. The most foolish thing you can think of. The gospel of a dead Messiah.

[29 : 44] But in God's wisdom it is the most powerful thing of all so preach it. And John's word is an encouragement to us to do just that.

To be a church which proclaims with boldness the gospel. Sweet on our lips but bitter in our stomach. Because sadly there will be people there will always be people who refuse to take it.

Who refuse to believe it. and mock those who preach it. John took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it.

And it tasted as sweet as honey in his mouth and when he'd eaten it his stomachs turned sour. And then he was told you must prophesy again about many peoples nations languages and kings.

I think John is preaching judgment. as he's been doing. And he's got to do it again. Bitter in his stomach. But keep on preaching the gospel. Just like the Old Testament prophets preaching judgment.

[30 : 53] And they always came just before some great catastrophe or calamity. Amos and Hosea 750-740 BC in the northern part of Israel.

20 years later the Assyrians overran them and they were destroyed and gone forever. they failed to heed the warning of the prophets. The prophets were derided and mocked told to be quiet.

Amos was told to go back home. But he kept preaching because God had spoken and therefore he the prophet must speak. Isaiah and Micah at a similar time. The judgment of God was averted but only temporarily.

When it came to the Babylonians there was Jeremiah Ezekiel Zephaniah slightly before them some other prophets. And again their word was not heeded and judgment came.

Jonah to Nineveh Nahum to Assyria Obadiah to Edom the prophets are largely prophets of judgment. The last chance for those nations before God's judgment comes. And John you see is in that line.

[31 : 53] That's what this is saying. John's words are showing us the last chance before the end comes. John of course did not have a commission to only go to Israel but rather as verse 11 said to all the nations languages and kings.

Well that's the first part of the interlude the bitter scroll. And the second part is about two witnesses. And this is one of the most notorious parts of Revelation to decipher.

And again I have to remember that I come to this with humility and some ignorance. But I'll see what I can explain to you. John was given a reed like a measuring rod and told to measure the temple of God the altar and count the worshippers there.

But exclude the outer court because it's been given to the Gentiles and they'll trample on it for 42 months. The city being described as Jerusalem the time of John the temple had been destroyed by the Romans 25 years before.

And yet we're told he is going to measure the temple. Clearly it's symbolic. It's not literal. The temple's been destroyed. We also know of course if you've read the last chapter if you tried to find out who did it at the end of Revelation there's no temple there.

[33 : 15] It's gone as well because God dwells with his people in perfection. But John is using Old Testament imagery again showing us that it's not literal it's symbolic.

And he's using Old Testament imagery because people would understand it. And at the center of the city of Jerusalem lay the center of the temple the holiest place of all where God himself so called dwelt.

And then there were various courts around the center extending out eventually to a lower platform where the Gentiles were. Gentiles could not go beyond there otherwise they'd be punished by death.

That's why Paul on a false charge was imprisoned at the end of the Acts of the Apostles. But here the temple is not a distinction between Jew and Gentile.

The distinction is now between the church and the world or Christians and non-Christians. John is using Old Testament imagery but he's transforming it like he's been doing consistently.

[34 : 16] And now the distinction is not Old Testament Israel and Old Testament Jews but Christians and non-Christians. the outer court exactly what that is is a slightly unclear in John's imagery certainly for the Old Testament temple is where the Gentiles went is being trampled upon.

Maybe that's referring back to the destruction of the temple by the Romans but maybe it's just a general picture of the persecution exercised by the non-Christian world on the Christian world.

It's for 42 months. 42 months you may know is 3 and a half years which is half of 7 years. Maybe it's suggesting that the time is limited. As a symbolic number wherever you get anything that adds up to 3 and a half years it is stating that the time for rampant evil is limited.

The 42 months the 1260 days the time the times and half a time the 3 and a half years however it's described is the time of rampant evil but it's limited and limited by God.

It's not evil with a totally free reign but it's got a free reign within the limits that God gives it. As it happened about 160 years before Jesus the pagans set up an idol in the temple of Jerusalem.

[35 : 38] It lasted for 3 and a half years before it was torn down and the temple cleansed as part of the Maccabean period. So maybe the 3 and a half years comes from that very famous for Jews and very notorious time showing that evil is limited and God's cleansing and justice and reign will come.

The measuring is probably about protection. Measuring sometimes is about testing people but here it seems clear that it's about protection. So count the number of worshippers just like in the first interlude we counted them and there were 144,000 or rather we didn't count them but someone told us there were 144,000 here also the measuring and the measuring I think is to do with protection that is a number that is I think implied sealed by God saved or secure in God's sanctuary in the inner temple remember it's not a literal temple because when Jesus came he did away with the temple as a geographical entity he said the real temple that will be raised in three days not 46 years as it had taken Herod and his successes to refurbish the temple three days is my body and then elsewhere in the New Testament my temple or the temple of God is not just Jesus body but Jesus body the church we are the temple of God if we're Christian people not a building but people and you see the New Testament makes a very big transformation in this idea of temple rather than have holy spaces or places as there are in the Old

Testament they're all done away with it's now holy people that's what matters so this church building is not a holy sacred space as though we come in here and we're closer to God because we're in this building but rather we're closer to God because there are two or three gathered in God's name and there he is in their midst it's the people that matter not the building God's as much with us here as if we're out in the car park or down in the Athenaeum hall or in some other public place or private place the building doesn't matter there's no sacred places anymore it's holy people because it's Jesus' body which is the temple but despite all that John is using Old Testament imagery because it's easy for his people to understand he's not saying there will be a temple in heaven he's using a picture to make a point and he's saying that God's people are safe even though the Gentiles meaning the world outside the non-Christian persecuting pagan Roman world even though they're trampling all over you and persecuting you you're safe in the sanctuary of

God this point about sacred places sadly has been so often misunderstood by Christians it's part of the division in the land of Israel and Palestine today the issue of Hebron is about a sacred place so called between Jews and Muslims thankfully it seems Christians are not getting in on the act because though it's the site of the burial of Abraham and Sarah and others it's not a sacred place for Christians there's no holy place left and if in time to come there is a huge battle about the temple mount site in Jerusalem which is an extraordinarily holy place for Jews and for Muslims let's make sure that Christians stand back because it may have been the site of the Old Testament temple and a holy place in Jerusalem and close to where Jesus died and rose but holy places are meaningless now Jerusalem is not a holy city anymore it's the people who are holy of course the church forgot that in the middle ages when they sent their crusades to try and recapture

Jerusalem for Christendom what an enormous error and tragedy that was and its repercussions are still being felt in the Islamic animosity expressed to Christians today let's remember that it's the people of God who are holy and not the place well that's those verses are an introduction to these two witnesses that come verse 3 says I will give my power give power to my two witnesses and they will prophesy for 1260 days and if you get your calculators out and divide by 365 you get about three and a half years it's working on a 30 day month so it's really three and a half years of 30 day months a limited period you see it's the same period as all the Gentiles trampling over the Christians persecuting them the same things are happening simultaneously while the church is being persecuted God is raising up witnesses the things are happening together and it's for a limited period of time this passage has often been taken literally as though there will be two literal witnesses at the end of time two people who will arise by God to speak

[40 : 37] God's witness but in the light of what we've seen and also in the light of some of the things that are happening here it's clear to me that it's not literal it's symbolic yes maybe at different points we can say those two people are in a sense fulfilling this but that's in a very small way it's a much bigger scale than that goes on to talk about the city being called Sodom and Egypt was never a city Sodom's not in Egypt it's obviously speaking symbolically picking up again Old Testament imagery to make a point and because it's linking back to what we've already just seen in chapter 10 and 11 verses 1 and 2 the symbolism continues three and a half years and so on verse 3 begins and showing that it's linked to what's gone before the symbolism continues on in spite of oppression and persecution God will send witnesses who are they they wear sackcloth a sign of repentance and mourning the witnesses were told are two olive trees it's a bit strange and two lampstands does that mean there are four no it doesn't mean an olive tree is a lampstand you see you end up with sort of

Lewis Carroll type imagery here that's a bit difficult to understand or an Escher print or something if you're trying to draw it the olive tree was a symbol for Israel a lampstand was a symbol for the church back in Revelation 1 Israel church old and new together the whole people of God I think is being represented here by these two witnesses not two individuals but the whole of the people of God if anyone tries to harm them fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies figuratively I think this is how anyone who wants to harm them must die and these men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they're prophesying who shut up the sky for three years Elijah and they have power to turn the waters into blood and strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want who did that Moses Moses and Elijah sum up the Old Testament the law and the prophets when Moses and Elijah appeared at Jesus transfiguration on the mount in part it's because there are individuals expected to return in the Old

Testament in part it's because the Old Testament equals law plus prophets and law equals Moses and prophets equals Elijah the end of the very end of the Old Testament in Malachi chapter 4 the last chapter of the Old Testament Moses and Elijah get mentioned again it seems that what we're doing what's happening here is a sort of summing up of the Old Testament and the New Testament all the people of God being represented in these symbolic figures of Moses and Elijah I think the two witnesses is important because in Jewish law in Old Testament law you needed two witnesses in order to bring about a judgment if you remember Queen Jezebel trying to get Naboth's vineyard for King Ahab remember she set up a meal and she said put two scoundrels there two because you need two witnesses and those two scoundrels brought false witness but because there were two their judgment stood and Naboth was killed what I think this is saying is that in each and every age of the church of the people of God

God is raising up witnesses two witnesses at least symbolizing I think the certainty of their statement that it's true and reliable it's saying that God in the face of opposition will always produce people who will witness to the gospel in the face of opposition you see this is really a call remember to John's readers to call to the church to be faithful to stand up and speak and be counted to be these witnesses that are being spoken about here it's a call to be bold and a call to persevere because God produces witnesses in the face of persecution and opposition if there were no opposition there would be no need for witnesses but there is so he raises up the witnesses to speak now when they finish their testimony the beast that comes up from the abyss will attack them and overpower and kill them we'll see this beast later on in next week their bodies will lie in the street of the great city which is figuratively called

Sodom and Egypt it was sort of Jerusalem before but now it's Sodom Sodom the worst of the immoral cities you could find in the Bible gross sexual immorality occurring back in Genesis 19 and Egypt the place where God's people were enslaved and oppressed standing for the opposition to God's truth standing for opposition to God's morality and opposition to the worship of God and it's the city where also their Lord was crucified began by being Jerusalem the holy city but the place where Jesus was crucified before he drove back they were trying to topple . . .

[46 : 35] But not only that, those who follow the Lord, the witnesses, the ones who speak for him, they share his fate and are killed and their bodies lie in the street.

This is not just speaking about judgment against Jerusalem, but it's really against the world. . . .

The night unburied is cursed, according to the Old Testament. So burial was really important. And that they're not buried for three and a half days is the greatest insult of all.

The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts. They declare a public holiday when the witnesses are killed. They're even more generous than Jeff Kennett.

And they declare this public holiday because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth. The great celebration of the pagan world that the witnesses of God are dead.

[48 : 04] That the pagan world has triumphed over Christianity. And yes, for John's readers, it would appear that they were in that situation. That God had forsaken them.

That they were dying like, going down like ninepins. Being martyred in the Roman world under the awful emperor Domitian. But, verse 11 begins, but, after three and a half days, another brief time, a breath of life from God entered them.

And they stood on their feet. And terror struck those who saw them. How brief the time of gloating. And how public God's vindication of them.

This is not a soul appearing in heaven. This is bodily resurrection. Public. And those who gloated are terror struck. Because they see in these dead bodies rising the invincible power of God.

They heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, Come up here. And the witnesses went up to heaven in a cloud.

[49 : 19] While their enemies looked on. Can you imagine the day of resurrection? What the pagans will look like? Those who have spent their lives mocking the church and mocking God.

Making fun of the Lord Jesus Christ. Pronouncing that God is dead. The gospel is dead. The church is dead. When Jesus comes again, imagine what they'll look like.

What stupid fools they will look like. Not that we will gloat at that. But the horror. That they will feel and see. As they recognize the invincible power of God.

Gloating that they were powerful. And yet ultimately, God will be vindicated. For the church of John's day, what an encouragement. But also for us.

I mean, the church today is very powerful. By contrast to John's day. A very small church. Insignificant. The appointment of a church leader wouldn't rate the Ephesus times in the days of John, probably.

[50 : 20] It does in our day. It shows that the church has influence, supposedly, in our world. And it does. Maybe not as much as we want, of course. But in John's day, the church was minuscule. And John is saying that the church will triumph.

This is Fitz Roy come back from the dead sort of thing. I want you to feel that. You know, we think of the church as a worldwide institution that's got a great deal of power. And it does. We fail to see what it was like in John's day.

Tiny and insignificant. What a radical word John had. To say that this tiny little group of people scattered around Asia Minor and Europe would actually be triumphant.

It's mind-boggling to imagine for John. We're closer to seeing it. We don't see how radical it is. No, God's not dead. He's sovereign.

He's Lord. He's all-powerful, John's saying. And so for a church-facing persecution, he's saying, trust him. And be faithful. And preach the gospel.

[51 : 24] And if it costs you your life, it doesn't matter. It costs your Lord his life. For you. Your life is not too great to pay.

Because you lose your life. Lose your goods. Lose your all. But it cannot take you or separate you from Christ. I was thinking of this when reflecting on the bushfires.

What would it have been like if my house had burned down and all my goods had gone? And people were saying our most treasured possessions, we've lost them. I couldn't say that.

Because the most treasured possession is immune from bushfire. Or theft. Or anything else. Nobody can take it away. Our faith in Christ and what Christ has done for us.

And so if we were to die for him, it doesn't separate us from him. But indeed brings us into his glory. For John's church, it seemed as though they were on this endless time of trouble and persecution.

[52 : 30] Three and a half years is the symbolic number. It's very brief. In the scale of eternity, it's just a tiny little blip. When people express their nerves before a wedding to me, I say, look, at the most it'll be for 60 years.

And in the light of eternity, that's nothing. This is a call to be faithful, even to death.

Verses 13 and 14 are sort of a postscript to it. The earthquake that we're getting used to in the book of Revelation. Sort of God's little stamp of what he's been saying. And then at last comes the seventh trumpet.

Loud voices in heaven. And we're back in heaven now, the end of all the catastrophe on the earth for a time. And now there's the songs of worship in heaven. Because they've seen the resurrection of the witnesses of the church that is faithful to its death.

That have risen to heaven by God's doing. It's God's breath breathed into them. And now it's heaven singing. It's not the martyrs singing or the church singing. It's heaven singing the praises of God.

[53 : 34] The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of the Lord. Not of Nero or Domitian or Rome or anybody else. But the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ. Not meaning two kingdoms, but one united in God and Christ.

And he will reign forever and ever. Not for three and a half years, but for eternity. What a contrast of time that is. It's a declaration of the triumph of God.

And it has become. It's something that's past event. Yes, in part it's still looked for in the future. But it's already begun because of the death and resurrection of the Lamb.

Who has conquered. And therefore God reigns. And though on earth it may not look as he does. And so heaven is singing the triumphs of God. Because God reigns in heaven and on earth.

And we can be sure of that because Jesus has died. That's what gives us the glimpse into heaven. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That, as I said three weeks ago, is the key to the book.

[54 : 33] Everything else comes and follows from that. Remember that all of what we're seeing here in Revelation comes because the Lamb is worthy to take the scroll and open it. That's why it's happening.

Because the Lamb died for us. And the 24 elders who are seated on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshipped God saying, We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the one who is and who was, because you've taken your great power and have begun to reign.

The nations were angry and your wrath has come. Not your wrath meaning some emotional hatred for people, but wrath which is the righteous anger at immorality and idolatry.

It's the holy expression of God against unholiness, if you like. That's what wrath is. Not some uncontrollable rage. The time has come for judging the dead and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great, and for destroying those who destroy the earth.

This is an issuing in of the rest of the book. Look, this is a sort of key for the following chapters that we'll begin to see next week. And then at the very end, this verse probably really should go with chapter 12 rather than verse 18.

[55 : 47] God's temple in heaven was opened. Again, it's picture imagery. It can't be taken literally because at the end of Revelation, there's no temple in heaven. It was opened. Within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant.

Not the real thing that was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC, despite all Harrison Ford's best efforts to find it. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

And then come what happens next. Another series begins. We've had the series of the seals, which issue into the series of the trumpets. The thunders were sort of put to one side.

And now the seventh trumpet begins the next series, the series of the beasts. And we'll look at that next week. What an encouragement this word is to us.

That God reigns. And we are to be faithful to him in proclaiming the gospel, even if it costs us our life.

[56 : 50] Solid time of questions last week, but we've got about five minutes left. If you have any questions, can I encourage you, if you do, to make them relevant and also to express them relatively briefly so that I can repeat the question for the benefit of the tape and others who don't hear.

So has anyone got anything they'd like to ask? It's, if you like, part of a package of idolatry.

There's another passage, I don't remember where, where you said it was actually the main thing. Oh, yes, I've got to repeat the question. I keep forgetting to do that, don't I? I mentioned that the sin of Sodom was the sin of sexual immorality.

Do I consider that their greatest sin? I think it's, as it's expressed in Genesis 19, which is the major part of the Old Testament that refers to it, that seems to be their greatest sin.

But I think it's recognized that it's part of their general idolatry. As a gentleman said, injustice is mentioned somewhere. I can't remember where that's mentioned as well. I think, you know, it's all part of a package, really, of opposition to God.

[57 : 58] Yeah. Question? Revelation with Daniel chapter 12. And, yes, I've referred to Daniel already tonight. Daniel is, I think, though apocalyptic, regarded in the line of prophecy.

And John as well in the line of prophecy. I mentioned that in Daniel there is a deliberate delay. And I think John is deliberately in contrast to that. In Daniel there is a delay until the end times.

The things that Daniel sees are not all told or revealed because the end times are not yet. But for John he's got a different perspective on it. And so in contrast to Daniel, things are being, you know, there's no delay.

And the sealing up of, I'm not sure whether you're referring to the sealing up of the thunders. Yes, I'm not sure that I'd say that the sealing up of the seven thunders at the beginning of chapter 10 is a deliberate reference back to this sealing up.

I think there are other parts of the Old Testament that, you know, talk about sealing up or keeping God's words hidden or whatever. So I'm not sure that that's a direct reference to Daniel. But it's in part in the general, you know, it could be in the general line of thinking of that.

[59 : 13] Yeah. Well, that might be jumping to a conclusion because we could say that that's right, but there could be other reasons. It's, as I said, we've got to plead ignorance.

There are all sorts of possibilities. And as soon as we say that we think this is the possibility, I think we're claiming too much. I could claim that's a possibility, but I wouldn't want to say it's the most likely necessarily.

Time for one last question. I was referring back to Revelation 7, that those have come out of the Great Tribulation. Is that a three and a half year tribulation or the sum total of the tribulation of the people of God?

The three and a half years is not really in Chapter 7. And I think one of the things about Revelation is that sometimes by, we have to be careful linking up one vision with another, I think, because they're not necessarily using the same imagery or always in exactly the same way.

I would say that it's the sum total of the tribulation of God without saying three and a half years. But then, you know, in one sense, maybe the three and a half years is another way of looking at the same thing. All right, let me give a couple of notices before we sing a final song.