

SESSION 5

REVELATION 8:2–11:19

Cycle Two: The Trumpet Judgments

I. OVERVIEW OF THE TRUMPET JUDGMENTS

A. The Response of the Unsaved

In the previous session, we had suggested that that the opening of the 7th seal *unfolded* the next cycle of judgments, i.e., the 7th seal is the seven trumpet judgments. These go beyond the seal judgments in the intensity of their severity. This is paralleled by an increasing “resistance” on the part of the unsaved in response to these judgments. In response to the seal judgments, the unsaved sought to hide themselves from God (6:15-17). But in response to the trumpets, the unsaved are characterized by their refusal to repent:

“And the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.”

B. The Seals and Trumpets Compared

There are a number of commonalities between the structuring of the seal judgments and that of the trumpet judgments (see chart of the Trumpets, *Suppl. 5.1*):

- both are introduced by a heavenly prelude (8:2-6 for trumpets)
- both have a two-part interlude between the first six judgments and the 7th
- in both cases, the opening of the 7th judgment contains a new cycle of judgment
- in both cases, there is an arrangement of the first six judgments into two parts: the first four judgments have a common uniting factor as do the final two.

The first four seals had the common factor of connection to four horses, whereas the next two seals considered two different reactions to the judgments. The first four trumpets involved ecological disasters on the earth (harming a 1/3), whereas the next two trumpets involved more direct afflictions to mankind (they are also distinguished by being called “woes”; the woes touch man himself [not just nature], first in torment [9:1-11] and then by massive loss of life [9:12-19]).

- in both cases, the response of the unsaved is stated after the 6th judgment.

Despite these commonalities, the trumpets represent an advance over the seals. This is evidenced not only by the greater severity of the judgments and the increasing resistance on the part of the unsaved, but also by the concluding judgment in the trumpet series (i.e., the 7th trumpet). Notice that the 7th judgment is much more elaborate in the case of the trumpets than we had seen with the seals. The 7th seal (8:1) was a brief remark in only one verse noting the silence in heaven. But the 7th trumpet (11:14-19) is longer and reflects in a much greater way the nearness to the end by elaborating that the Messianic Kingdom is just about to come in which the Lord will reign over the earth.

C. Allusion to the Heavenly Tabernacle

Another overall observation that I have made about the trumpets is their emphasis upon the temple/tabernacle of heaven. The Book of Revelation seems to move in the direction of bringing this into reality. For instance, in Rev 21, following the mention of the new heaven and new earth, we hear a loud voice declaring, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them” (21:3). In that phase of the kingdom, however, the temple is the presence of God. In Rev 21:22, we read, “And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple.” Hence, the New Jerusalem has no other temple than God Himself. Prior to the New Jerusalem, however, we do have the heavenly tabernacle/temple. According to Heb 8:4-5, Moses was commissioned to make the first tabernacle in the likeness of the heavenly one:

“Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for ‘See,’ He says, ‘that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.’”

Furthermore, Christ’s sacrifice was presented in the heavenly tabernacle once for all, for which reason it is infinitely superior to the high priest’s sacrifice of the Old Covenant:

“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; . . . “ (Heb 9:11; cf. 9:23-24).

Regarding this heavenly tabernacle, we see further glimpses of this in the cycle of the trumpet judgments. Furthermore, this occurs in the opening and closing of the cycle. We have reference to this in the heavenly prelude of 8:2-6, and again at the 7th trumpet in 11:14-19. This is further reinforced by an angel in heaven which dispenses “fire” to the earth. Notice these elements:

Opening “And another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. . . . And the angel took the censer; and he filled it with the fire of the altar and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake” (8:3,5).

Closing “And the temple of god which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm” (11:19).

So, in both we have reference to various aspects of the heavenly tabernacle (altar of incense and the ark of the covenant) as well as heaven-sent storm elements. If nothing else, this at least serves as an inclusio to “bind” the section together. Yet, we do see this temple theme being taken up and given more prominence when we come to the bowl judgments (e.g., 15:5ff.; 16:1). I might also point out that there does not seem to be any veil between the golden altar of incense and the heavenly Holy of Holies (presumably where the throne dwells; cf. Heb 10:19-20).

D. Parallels to the Plagues of Egypt

There are similarities of the trumpet judgments (and bowls) to the plagues that fell on Egypt (see Ex 7:8–11:8), although the details cannot be pressed too far. In fact, the “woes” are

called plagues in Rev 9:18 (cf. 15:1). As with Pharaoh and the Egyptians, God is bringing (through judgment) a strong incentive to repent. The divine action becomes progressively harsher as God does what is necessary to achieve His will. Notice these comparisons and contrasts:

Comparisons

1. Similarity of Judgments
 - a. In the first plague, the Nile was changed to blood (Ex 7:14-25). In the Tribulation, we have water being turned to blood (Rev 8:8-9; 16:3-7).
 - b. In the sixth plague, boils appear on the people (Ex 9:8-12). In the first bowl judgment, those with the “mark of the beast” are hit with boils (Rev 16:2).
 - c. In the seventh plague, hail comes down from heaven (Ex 9:13-35). We see this again in Revelation, in the first trumpet (8:7) and the seventh bowl (16:21).
 - d. In the eighth plague, locusts go out across the land (Ex 10:1-20). In the fifth trumpet, locusts go forth to torment mankind (9:1ff.). The former are obviously literal locusts, whereas the latter seem to be symbolical of demons.
 - e. In the ninth plague, darkness is brought on the land (Ex 10:21-29). In Revelation, we see something similar in the 6th seal (6:12ff.), the 4th trumpet (8:12), and the 5th bowl (16:10-11).
2. Three-cycle Format of the Judgments

Both the plagues and the judgments of Revelation take place in three cycles. With the plagues, however, there are three cycles of three judgments each followed by the death of the Pharaoh’s first-born son. In Revelation, we have three cycles of seven judgements each, followed by the “death” of the Antichrist (Satan’s first-born). In both the plagues and the Tribulation, Satan’s “agent” is a political figure.
3. Increasing Severity of Judgment

In both cases, each cycle brings on a more severe affliction from God. At the same time, more and more is revealed of God and the scope and force of His power. Both situations result in the triumph of God over a Satanic inspired rebellion.
4. An Increased Hardness on the Part of the Ungodly

In both the plagues and the Tribulation, those opposed to God experience an increased hardness of heart as the judgments proceed.
5. Focus on Nature

In both the plagues and the Tribulation, there is a focus of the judgments on nature (e.g., sun, water, earth, vegetation, etc.), and as a consequence nature is destroyed.
6. Spokesmen for God

In the plagues, God is represented by two spokesmen, namely, Moses and Aaron. In Revelation, we see the two witnesses. Although Moses and Aaron do not die, the latter die and return to life.
7. Final Battle

In both accounts, the rivalry ends with a defeat of armies. With the plagues, Pharaoh’s army is defeated at the Red Sea. In Revelation, the Beast’s army is defeated by the return of Christ (Rev 19).
8. Victory Through the Blood

With the plague judgment, the Hebrews escaped death by slaying a lamb and putting the blood on the doorpost. In Revelation, the saints *overcome* “because of the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 12:11), though they are not necessarily protected from physical death.

Contrasts

In addition to some contrasts already pointed out along with the comparisons, we should note that some of the plagues upon Egypt do not have a necessary parallel. For instance, the frogs (Ex 8:1-15), gnats (8:16-19), insects (8:20-32), and the plague on the livestock (9:1-7) are not emphasized in Revelation. Perhaps there is some connection to the three unclean spirits like frogs mentioned in Rev 16:13 (?). The geographical extent is obviously different, the

plagues being more localized and the Tribulation judgments more universal. In the case of the plagues, the Hebrews are spared and then released by Pharaoh, but in the Tribulation Jews suffer intense persecution (144,000 are specially "sealed").

E. Miscellaneous Comments on the First Four Trumpets

The first four trumpets seem to all have some parallel with the plagues on Egypt except possibly the third. In the case of the third trumpet, a star named "Wormwood" (Gk ὁ Ἄψιυθος) contaminates a third of the waters. Wormwood contains a very bitter substance, and hence the waters were made fatally bitter. This scene, however, is probably intended as an allusion to the Old Testament. In Deut 29:17-21, the Israelites were warned about those who might "poison" the land by turning to idolatry. More specifically, however, "wormwood" was used figuratively of judgment in the Book of Jeremiah, namely, the discipline that God would bring upon Israel at the time of the Babylonian captivity. In Jer 23:15-16, "wormwood" was used to speak figuratively of the judgment that God would give to the false prophets who polluted the land with their false utterances. In the case of Revelation, the allusion to Jeremiah once again represents judgment being carried out on those who have polluted God's world. However, it seems to be a literal judgment upon the waters in Rev 8:10-11.

II. THE FIFTH TRUMPET: THE LOCUST WOE (9:1-11)

A. Their Source (9:1-2)

After the fifth angel sounds his trumpet, we are introduced to "a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth." A few verses earlier (in 8:10), we were introduced to a star that fell from heaven. Despite the similarity, they seem to refer to different matters. The first (though having a name) has no other animate characteristics. The latter, however, cannot be simply a literal star. Thomas notes, "The star's receipt and use of 'the key of the pit and the abyss' (vv. 1-2) shows that it stands for an intelligent being."¹

The star of 9:1 is probably an angelic figure, mainly because he is given a key and opens the abyss. In Scripture, angels are frequently referred to as "stars" (cf. Job 38:7; Isa 14:12-13; Dan 8:10). That he could be a "fallen angel" is also likely. In Rev 12:4, we are told that the dragon (Satan, see 12:9) swept away a third of the stars and threw them to the earth, and in 12:7,9 we find Satan associated with these "stars" which are then called "his angels." Mounce, however, feels that the description "fallen" in 9:1 could simply mean "to descend." Thus, the star would simply be a divine agent for carrying out the will of God.² However, πρῆπτω (fall) often means to stumble or fail (cf. Heb 4:11; Jas 5:12). In Revelation, it is always used in a negative sense with a nuance of judgment (with the exception of 4:10). Moreover, in 20:1 we are introduced to another angel having the key of the abyss, but this angel is said to be "coming down" (καταβαίνοντα) from heaven and he binds Satan. The star of 9:1 is probably a "fallen angel" then. I Enoch 21:6 depicts the fallen angels as "stars of heaven which have transgressed the commandment of the Lord." Whether or not this fallen angel in 9:1 is Satan himself (so Walvoord) is another issue, which may be dependent on whether or not we connect v 1 with v 11.³

¹ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 2:26.

² Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 192.

³ Thomas takes the star to be an "unfallen angel" on a divine mission. He notes, "The edge of probability in deciding between an unfallen angel and Satan favors the unfallen angel as the star's identification, because to make the participle *peptōkota* refer to Satan's one-time fall from heaven is to attach too much theological significance to a passing detail in the unfolding of one of the trumpet judgments" (2:27).

The key is given to the fallen angel, which probably means that this fallen angel is given authority over the pit (comp. Rev 1:18). That the key is "given" implies that the authority is delegated and allowed by a higher authority (apparently the key is taken away and given to a godly angel following Christ's triumph in ch 19).

But what does this fallen angel have authority over? Both the *NASB* and *KJV* poorly translate this as the "bottomless pit." The *NIV* "abyss" is more accurate. The phrase reads τοῦ φρέατος τῆς ἀβύσσου, the pit or shaft of the abyss. This is significant, because the abyss is a special place of confinement for very evil and fierce demons. The demons of the Gerasene demoniac pleaded with Christ that He not send them to the abyss (Lk 8:31), and Satan will eventually be bound there during the millennium (Rev 20:1,3; cf. 11:7; 17:8). In Jude 6, we are told that certain angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, are being kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day (cf. 2 Pet 2:4). The abyss is clearly a place where these fierce demons reside. This is a strong argument for understanding these locusts in a non-literal way. These creatures are not insects of a huge plague, but fierce demons who ordinarily are kept in special confinement. The fact that these "locusts" have their source in the abyss and are released under the authority of an angelic being contributes significantly to this interpretation. Thomas (2:30) adds,

Their attack against men rather than consuming of green vegetation points to their demonic nature (Beasley-Murray). They have a form such as no human being has ever seen (Bullinger, Seiss, Walvoord). The ability of demons to assume an assortment of material forms is further illustrated in 16:13 where three demons appear as frogs (Smith).

B. Their Power (9:3-6)

The locusts are explicitly said to have power, and this may be reflected even in the smoke which rises with them. Smoke is an appropriate figure of torment experienced by God's judgment (cf. Rev 14:11). The comparison with the scorpions stresses the torment that these "locusts" bring. Regarding scorpions, the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia* states, "The sting is used with precision to paralyze the prey, which is then consumed by pumping digestive juices into it, and sucking out the broken-down tissues."⁴ This vivid descriptiveness of their torment confirms that the locusts are not to be taken literally.

In vv 4-5, restrictions on their tormenting power are explained. They are not to harm vegetation, but only men. Furthermore, those who have the seal of God on their foreheads are exempted. This would include the 144,000 and possibly other believers as well. No one is allowed to be killed. Their purpose is to torment only, as an incentive to repentance. Swete comments, "Men and not mere food stuffs are their goal."⁵

In v 6, the effect of their torment is described. The torment of these demonic creatures is so terrible that men will want to die, and yet they will not be able. The gospels reveal that those who are in the grip of demonic affliction are not free to exercise their own will and therefore are not free to take their own lives.

C. Their Appearance (9:7-10)

The most troublesome matter for our interpretation is the awesome appearance of these creatures. The imagery of the locusts is not only reminiscent of the locust plague of Exodus, but also that of Joel 1–2. Several details of their appearance have parallels to Joel:

⁴ *ZPEB*, s.v. "Scorpion" by G. S. Cansdale, 5:297.

⁵ Henry B. Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, 116.

Joel 1:6	- their teeth are the teeth of a lion (Rev 9:8b)
Joel 2:4a	- have the appearance of horses (Rev 9:7)
Joel 2:4b	- run like war horses (Rev 9:7,9)
Joel 2:5	- have noise as of chariots (Rev 9:9)
Joel 2:6	- people are in anguish before them (Rev 9:6,10)
Joel 2:10	- darkening of the sun, etc. (Rev 8:12)
Joel 2:12	- people called to repentance (Rev 9:20-21)

Furthermore, Joel is also writing about the "day of the Lord." Despite these parallels, it is difficult to see much connection between the two. Their appearance in Rev 9 includes their heads, faces, teeth, breastplates, wing sounds, and tails. I find it difficult to press these comparisons for meaning. The main point seems to be that they are obviously not natural locusts. Others have probably gone too far in attempting to pinpoint their features.⁶

D. Their Leader

The demonic identification is once more confirmed by the leader who has charge over them as a king. His names identify him closely with the demons. His name is specified to be Abaddon (Ἀβαδδών) in Hebrew. This simply is a transliteration of אָבַדְדֹון from the Hebrew root אָבַד. "In the Northwest Semitic languages, the primary meaning of 'abhadh' is 'to perish.'"⁷ Consequently, אָבַדְדֹון is associated with the place where people perish, i.e., the grave. "Very rarely does this word mean 'destruction' . . . Much more often in the OT, and particularly in Wisdom Literature, it means the 'place of destruction,' i.e., the underworld."⁸ The word is used in parallel with Sheol, death, and the grave (cf. Job 26:6; 28:2; Pr 15:11; 27:20; and Ps 88:12). In one instance (Job 28:22), the word is used as a personification of death.

The other name is Apollyon (Ἀπολλύων), the Greek name which corresponds with אָבַדְדֹון. This is from ἀπολλυμι meaning to ruin or destroy.⁹ The word has strong associations with eternal perdition: Just as *sōtēria* (salvation) and *zōē aiōnios* (eternal life) connote sure and lasting salvation, so *apollymi* and *apōleia* mean "definitive destruction, not merely in the sense of the extinction of physical existence, but rather of an eternal plunge into Hades and a hopeless destiny of death."¹⁰

This angel that John notes in Rev 9:11 is the one who rules over the abyss. Although the abyss may be distinct from hell, i.e., the lake of fire, it is certainly related in that it is the place of destruction and torment. Abaddon is probably a real creature, since John calls him an angel. Swete also notes, "The personification of Abaddon is known to the Talmud; see Shabb. f. 55a, where six destroying Angels are mentioned, over whom preside אָבַדְדֹון and אָבַדְדֹון . . ."¹¹

Probably, Abaddon is identical to the fallen angel of 9:1-2 (so Thomas). The first had the authority (the key) over the abyss, and the latter is called "the angel of the abyss" (who is king). Although the possibility exists that this could be Satan himself, the evidence is not

⁶ Hal Lindsey, though acknowledging the demonic connection, mentions the possibility of the locusts being "cobra helicopters" such as were used in Vietnam [nerve gas sprayed from their tails?] (*There is a New World Coming*, 138-39). This kind of speculation is excessive.

⁷ *TDOT*, s.v. "אָבַדְדֹון," by Benedikt Otzen, 1:19.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:23.

⁹ *NIDNTT*, s.v. "ἀπόλλεῖα," by H. C. Hahn, 1:462.

¹⁰ *TDNT*, s.v. "ἀπόλλεῖα," by A. Oepke, 1:396.

¹¹ Swete, 120.

conclusive. At any rate, the name of this angel reflects both his character as well as that of the demonic realm as a whole. Their true intent in drawing men away from God is only that they might ultimately destroy and ruin men.

E. Conclusion

The star which falls in Rev 9:1 is actually an angel who rules as king over the abyss where fierce and evil demons are being confined. During the tribulation period, this angel (named "Destroyer") will be given authority to release these demons so that they come upon the ungodly as a plague of locusts to torment them.

The purpose of this section is two-fold. In one sense, it is a movement of God's grace to bring man to repentance (cf. 9:20-21). On the other hand, as man still refuses to repent, it demonstrates that God is just in bringing on still harsher punishment which will come in the judgment of the bowls. Hence, the bowl judgments are needful. W. Milligan's comment is insightful: "The judgment refers to 'a great outburst of spiritual evil which shall aggravate the sorrows of the world, make it learn how bitter is the bondage of Satan, and teach it to feel even in the midst of enjoyment that it were better to die than to live.'"¹²

III. THE INTERLUDE (10:1–11:13)

In similar fashion to the *seal judgments*, we have an interlude between the first six trumpets and the final trumpet. This interlude is much more extensive than before (cf. 7:1-17), and involves the "strong angel" with the little book and the two witnesses. This serves to prepare us for further developments.

A. The Strong Angel with the Little Book (10:1-11)

Following the "strong angel's" cry, the seven peals of thunder sound, but their content is so severe that John is not permitted to record it. This section serves to anticipate with an even greater suspense the final events of this period. Up until this time, men have been given opportunity to repent, but there will no longer be delay (10:6). The remaining events will make repentance all the more difficult. There is a throb toward final culmination that one can deeply sense at this point (10:7).

1. Introduction to the Angel (10:1-4)

a. Angel's Identity

Some have thought that the characteristics describe Christ:

- (1) cloud - Ps 104:3
- (2) rainbow - Rev 4:3
- (3) face as sun - Matt 17:2; Rev 1:16
- (4) feet - Ex 13:21

More likely, this is a special angel:

- (1) Rev 5:2 mentions another strong angel who is not Christ
- (2) Christ is never called an angel in Revelation
- (3) This one is called an ἄλλος angel (another of the same sort)
- (4) He swears by God (implying he is less than God)

b. Position of his feet

¹² W. Milligan quoted by Wilbur M. Smith in *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, 1509.

Notice that one foot is on the sea and one on the land (or earth). In 13:1, the beast comes from the sea and the false prophet (13:11) from the earth. This suggests God's authoritative position over them.

c. The Little Book

The little book is in contrast to the seven-sealed scroll of ch 4–6. This book is already open and specifically called a "little book," referring to its small size.

5:1 - βιβλίον

10:2 - βιβλαρίδιον

d. Seven Peals of Thunder

Possibly, this could have been another series of judgments. Their message is sealed, however. "This illustrates a divine principle that while God has revealed much, there are secrets which God has not seen fit to reveal to man at this time" (Walvoord, 171).

2. Announcement of the End of the Age (10:5-7)

KJV = "there should be time no longer" (ὅτι χρόνος οὐκέτι ἔσται)

The idea is not that "time" will cease in eternity, but that time has run out for those in the Tribulation. There will be no more delay in the execution of God's judgment (which is good news to the martyrs of 6:9-12).

vs. 7 - the "mystery of God" is finished (τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ)

While this could have something to do with Israel (Rom 11:25) or the mystery of lawlessness (2 Thess 2:7), more likely this is to be connected in thought to 11:15-19 in which the 7th trumpet is sounded:

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever We give Thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who wast, because Thou hast taken Thy great power and hast begun to reign. . . ."

In the OT, the kingdom of God was preached by the prophets. In Matthew's gospel, as the rejection of the Jewish leaders became evident against Jesus (Matt 12), the Lord began to teach about the mystery of the Kingdom with repeated statements "The kingdom of heaven is like . . ." In Matt 13:11, our Lord told the disciples, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted."

Even Robert Mounce connects 10:7 to the kingdom of God, noting that this refers to "the purpose of God as revealed in the consummation of human history" (212). The 7th trumpet will reveal the final establishment of God's rule on the earth. Walvoord's comments are appropriate:

The prediction is related to the full manifestation of the divine power, majesty, and holiness of God which will be evident in the glorious return of Christ, the establishment of His millennial kingdom, and the creation of the eternal state which will follow. The ignorance of God and the disregard of His majestic person which characterize the present age as well as the great tribulation will exist no longer when Christ returns and manifests Himself in glory to the entire earth (172).

Thus, at 11:19 we are basically at the end. The bowl judgments are quick . . . rat-tat-tat!

3. John's Reception of the Little Book (10:8-11)

This section confirms John's prophetic call and anticipates that more events are to be revealed. The book is to be eaten (cf. Ezek 2:9–3:3; Jer 15:15-17). It is sweet in that it is from God and hence "the truth" (cf. Ps 19:9-10). It is bitter in that it reveals divine judgments and God's wrath. Mounce goes so far as to say that it looks at 11:1-13 which he takes to picture the *believing church* (216), a very doubtful interpretation.

B. The Two Witnesses at Jerusalem (11:1-13)

For an excellent summary of the historical interpretation of the two witnesses, see Daniel K. K. Wong, "The Two Witnesses in Revelation 11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154:615 (Jul-Sep 1997): 344-54. He points out that the interpretations can be categorized in one of three ways: (1) the symbolic view; (2) the corporate view; and (3) the literal view. Each of these has numerous subcategories.

In some sense, these two witnesses are paralleled by Satan's two figures, the beast and the false prophet. All are involved in miraculous powers and seek to influence men either for the Lord or for Satan. Their ministries seem to coincide, and at the close of the tribulation, the beast is permitted to put them to death. Their resurrection by God and their ascension in view of their enemies attests to the superiority of the God of heaven over Satan and his figureheads. The information at this point anticipates the victorious side in the struggle.

This section has been one of greatest difficulty to interpreters, particularly the identification of the two witnesses. Johnson notes, "Identifications range all the way from two historic figures raised to life, to two groups, to two principles, such as the law and the prophets. Tertullian (d. 220) identified the two with Enoch and Elijah."¹³

A number of modern scholars have attempted to view them in a representative fashion. Johnson remarks,

Indications that they are representative of many individuals and not just two are that (1) they are never seen as individuals but do everything together – they prophesy together, suffer together, are killed together, are raised together, and ascend together - and all this is hardly possible for two individuals; (2) the beast makes war on them (v. 7), which is strange if they are merely two individuals; (3) people throughout the whole world view their ignominious deaths (v. 9) – something quite impossible if only two individuals are involved; (4) they are described as two "lamps" (v. 4), a figure applied in chapters 1 and 2 to local churches comprised of many individuals."¹⁴

Mounce and Johnson both follow the representative view. Ladd takes them symbolically also, but not of the church. He views them as a prophecy of the preservation and ultimate salvation of the Jewish people (in keeping with Rom 9–11).¹⁵ Personally, I do not find the "representative interpretation" convincing. Walvoord notes, "The use of the article with the expression 'two witnesses' in verse 3 seems to signify that they are specific persons. The

¹³Alan Johnson, "Revelation," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 504.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵George E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 150-51.

actions are those of people; and their resultant death and resurrection, including their bodies lying in the streets of Jerusalem for three and one-half days, can hardly refer to Israel, the church, or the Word of God."¹⁶ That they have power to kill their enemies hardly seems fitting for the representative view (whether the church or Israel be in view). To this, I might add that verse four is an allusion to Zechariah 4:3,11,14, where two literal individuals were in view.

I feel that Mounce only gets himself entangled in something he cannot get out of. He ends up with the conclusion that the court is symbolic of the church, the temple is the church, the holy city is the church, and the two witnesses are the church. This in itself seems unconvincing, and it forces very unnatural conclusions about other elements of the passage. Vs. 8 which talks of the dead bodies in the great city (identified as the city "where also their Lord was crucified," i.e., Jerusalem) is troublesome for Mounce and Johnson. Mounce concludes that a literal city is not meant: "The great city in which the martyred church lies dead is the world under the wicked and oppressive sway of Antichrist" (227). Johnson also struggles to get around vs. 8,

Wherever God is opposed and his servants harassed and killed, there is the 'great city,' the trans-historical city of Satan, the great mother of prostitutes (cf. 17:1ff). What can happen to God's witnesses in any place is what has already happened to their Lord in Jerusalem (506).

The resurrection of the two witnesses and the earthquake must be dealt with. Johnson comments that the physical resurrection and ascension of the church could be in view (the rapture?), but then says, "On the other hand, John may be using the figure of physical resurrection to represent the church's victory over the death blow of the beast" (507). He also says the earthquake is symbolic of a world-wide event (507).

Those who follow a representative view (such as Mounce and Johnson) and try to interpret things in relation to the church, fall into great subjectivity. The most natural explanation is to regard these two witnesses as two prophets who will be raised up from among those who turn to Christ in the last half of Daniel's 70th week (so Walvoord, 179). Since they minister for 1260 days (i.e., 3 1/2 years; vs. 3), their ministry is during the entire time of the seals, trumpets and bowls. Hence, their ministry is concurrent with the time of power of the beast and false prophet. They are only introduced to us at this point in the book, though they have been active throughout the time of the seals and trumpets.

The text gives no clues that a literal interpretation should be abandoned. In contrast, the passage about the locusts (9:1-11) had several clues in the text itself that a literal understanding was not intended. There is nothing in 11:1-13 that could not easily be understood in a literal sense. I prefer to take the "two witnesses" as two historic people, but their identity remains an open question. With this, Daniel Wong agrees: "The witnesses are two unknown eschatological figures who will minister in the spirit and power of Moses and Elijah in the future tribulation period."¹⁷

IV. THE SEVENTH TRUMPET (11:14-19)

In similar fashion to the seal judgments, the 7th trumpet (= 3rd woe) follows the brief interlude and

¹⁶John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ; A Commentary*, 179.

¹⁷Daniel K. K. Wong, "The Two Witnesses in Revelation 11," 354. Wong does note that one of the more popular suggestions (under the literal view) has been to understand them as Enoch and Elijah. After careful evaluation, however, he rejects this suggestion.

contains the next cycle of seven judgments, i.e., the bowl judgments. As we will see in 15:1, these will complete the wrath of God. Hence, the 7th trumpet is at the end of the Great Tribulation. The previous judgments have been strung out, allowing an opportunity for repentance, but now there will be no more delay in the execution of God's wrath, (cf. 10:6). The 7th trumpet (= 7 bowls) will take place quickly.

Because the judgments are nearing completion and the end is now in sight, the narrative pauses in 11:15-19 to remind the reader of the coming victory and what that will bring with it. Excitement is building as the millennial kingdom of Christ is about to be established. The text words it in terms of an accomplished event, since the victory is now so certain (these verses are a literary technique!).

This is like a great athletic contest in which the winning side is beginning their celebration before the final whistle has even blown!

The long period of "the times of the Gentiles" is coming to an end as the long awaited Messianic kingdom is about to replace the Gentile kingdoms of this world, ruled by the "god of this world" (cf. Dan 2:44).

Notice in vs. 15 that the kingdom from which Christ initiates His reign does have an earthly aspect. Could the issue of rewards in vs. 18 have anything to do with the theme of overcoming?