

Revelation #5 God's Warning to Rome

Let's Pray. Turn to Rev 8. This is Revelation Class #5 and today we will cover Chapters 8-11. Class #1 covered Chapter 1 and the who, what, when and where of Revelation. Class #2 explained our overall theory of the book of Revelation – that the book is about the persecution of the church by the Roman Empire. In Class #3, Alan showed us several themes in the 7 letters to the churches from Rev 2&3. Last week, in Class #4 Alan covered Chapters 4-7 and talked about the throne room of God, the opening of 6 of the seals on the scroll, the 4 horsemen of the Apocalypse and the sealing of the 144,000 disciples. One of the key verses from last week is 6:11 where God tells the martyrs in heaven they must wait until the full number of martyrs is complete before God will judge and avenge them. That time of waiting continues through Chapters 8 & 9 as we will see today, but then in Chapters 10 & 11 we hear the announcement that the wait is over.

Read 8:1-5. The 7th seal is opened and there is silence. A sense of great anticipation about what will happen next. The 7 angels who stand before God are given 7 trumpets. These aren't just any angels – these are the angels who stand in the presence of God. Another example is Gabriel – who delivered the messages about the birth of Jesus. When he talked with Zechariah – the father of JB - in Luke 1:19 – Gabriel emphasized he stands in the presence of God. The angels who stand in the presence of God are those who delivery very important messages.

These angels are given trumpets. What are trumpets for? They sound warnings. Herald pronouncements from the king. You pay attention when a trumpet blows. In 1 Cor 14:8 Paul says a trumpet or bugle sounds the call to battle. These trumpets sound a series of warnings or partial judgments of God against Rome – calling Rome to repent of its evil ways. The martyrs of 6:11 must wait while these warnings are given.

1st trumpet – hail and fire devastates the land – 1/3rd of trees and grass burned up. This suggests adverse weather – hail destroys crops; drought dries them up.

2nd trumpet – sea affected – 1/3rd of fish die and 1/3rd of ships destroyed. Perhaps suggests storms or other natural disasters that hinder shipping and fishing.

3rd trumpet – rivers affected. 1/3rd again. Perhaps floods and contamination so that the water is not fit to drink. We can see this in the news with the Mississippi.

4th trumpet – sun & stars affected. 1/3rd of the light reduced. In 79AD, a few years before Revelation, the volcano Vesuvius erupted and just like the volcano in Iceland this year – spread a huge cloud of ash and dust that veiled the sun, the moon and the stars and reduced the amount of light both day and night.

Chapter 9. 5th trumpet – the horrible locusts from the Abyss. Caused pain but not death. Perhaps refers to disease. One of the major causes for the decline of Rome was a series of epidemic diseases that swept across the Empire and reduced the population. Some diseases are caused by sin – come directly from hell like these locusts. Diseases relating to drunkenness and sexual immorality. These sins were rampant in Rome.

6th trumpet – army of horsemen threaten invasion from beyond the Euphrates River. 1/3rd of the population is killed. The Euphrates was the eastern border of the

Roman Empire. At the time Revelation was written, the Parthians lived across the Euphrates and fought on horseback – they were the only nation Rome tried but failed to conquer. Another major factor in the decline and fall of Rome was invasion from the east by a several waves of nomadic peoples – Huns, Goths, Visigoths.

The devastation announced by the 6 trumpets overlaps with the 4 horsemen of the Apocalypse from last week's lesson – conquest, warfare, famine and disease. The use of 1/3rd throughout these two chapters is symbolic for a significant but partial number. God was inflicting only partial judgment. Later in Revelation we shall see a more complete judgment inflicted in similar ways. Like the trumpets themselves, these 1/3rd events were warnings. Rome was given an opportunity to repent and change its evil ways. During the 1st and 2nd Centuries, Rome was generally strong. This is considered the Golden Age of the Roman Empire. However, in the 3rd Century, this changed and Rome began its long decline. Quote from Wikipedia:

The Crisis of the Third Century (235–284 AD) was a period in which the [Roman Empire](#) nearly collapsed under the combined pressures of [invasion](#), [civil war](#), [plague](#), and [economic depression](#).

Read 9:20-21. The warnings don't work. Unlike the city of Ninevah that repented at the preaching of Jonah, the pagan people of the Roman Empire refused to repent. They continue in their evil ways. The Crisis of the Third Century ended with the rise to power of the Emperor Diocletian. He was the last and greatest persecutor of Christianity who tried to restore the glory of pagan Rome. 6 trumpets have blown their warnings with the 7th and final trumpet yet to sound. Various calamities occurred which weakened Rome and called it to repent, but to no avail. What will God do next? We reach a turning point in the Book of Revelation.

Read Chapter 10:1-7. This mighty angel reveals another scroll. The scroll with 7 seals from Chapter 6 revealed that Roman persecution would continue for some time and that God would initiate a series of partial judgments to call the Roman Empire to repent. These warnings failed to produce repentance and so now God sends another scroll. In v. 6-7 the angel announces there will be no more delay. The wait from Chapter 6:11 will now come to an end. In v.8-11, John is told to eat the little scroll so that he will again prophesy. By this new scroll and its new prophesy announced by the 7th trumpet the mystery of God will be fulfilled. The final judgment of God on Rome will be declared and will be the theme of the chapters we will cover over the next couple of weeks.

Chapter 11. But first, an interlude similar to the interlude between the opening of the 6th and 7th seal. Read 11:1-3. John is told to measure the temple of God and those who worship there. Only the inner court is measured. The outer court is left to the nations who will trample the holy city for 42 months. Like the sealing of the 144,000, this suggests protection by God for those in the inner court. What does the temple represent? Some interpreters claim the Book of Revelation was written in 69AD and this is a prophesy of the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem in 70AD by the Romans. As Alan mentioned a couple of weeks ago, the 70AD theory requires ignoring all of the ancient evidence that Revelation was written in 95AD. By 95 the temple in

Jerusalem had been destroyed for 25 years. More likely, the temple refers to the church. I Cor 3:16 and I Pet 2:5 both refer to the church as the temple of God. The “holy city” of v.2 then also means the church and the “trampling” is the same persecution of the church by the Romans that is the theme of the Book of Revelation. 42 months is symbolic for the same period of persecution during which the martyrs must continue to wait in Rev 6:11 and the end of which is announced in Rev 10:7. It doesn’t seem likely that Chapter 11 is all about Jerusalem, because it is called the “holy city” in v.2 and then “Sodom” in v.11. Makes more sense if two different “cities” are meant – a good city and a bad city.

Starting in v.3, 2 witnesses prophesy for 1,260 days. This is the same period as the 42 months of v.2 so these witness prophesy during the same period of v.2 or perhaps an earlier similar period that ends when the persecution or trampling begins. v.4 calls the 2 witnesses 2 olive trees and 2 lampstands. This echoes the prophet Zechariah – in Zech 4 the same image of 2 olive trees and 2 lampstands appear and they are called the 2 anointed ones. In Rev 11:5-6, the 2 witnesses are protected from harm until they have finished their testimony. Then, in v.7, the beast from the abyss will kill them. v.8 says they will die in the “great city” symbolically called Sodom and Egypt where their Lord was crucified. The death of Jesus suggests Jerusalem, but “great city” means Rome in Rev 17:18, and the beast here is probably the same beast Satan calls from the sea in Rev 13:1 – the Roman Empire. Jesus was executed by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate and therefore symbolically he was killed by the great city Rome. These 2 witnesses could be symbolic for all Christian testimony of this period. However, in the Book of Acts, “witness” refers to the apostles, and the 2 witnesses here could mean the 2 chief apostles Peter and Paul. In Gal 2:7-9, Peter was given responsibility for taking the gospel to the Jews and Paul the responsibility for taking the gospel to the Gentiles. Both were protected against various threats while preaching for several years and then both were killed in Rome by Nero in the mid 60s. They would fit the description given here. When Revelation was first read to our 1st Century bros and sisters and two witnesses to Jesus were mentioned, I think Peter and Paul would most naturally spring to mind.

11:15-19. The 7th trumpet finally sounds. *The kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of God.* This is the same prophesy from Daniel 2 and 7. The 4th kingdom, the Roman Empire, will make war on the kingdom of God, but the kingdom of God will prevail and replace the Roman Empire and last forever and ever. In a literal sense, some think this prophesy came true when the Roman Emperor Constantine became a Christian in the 4th Century. He built the City of Constantinople which ruled over the Byzantine Empire for centuries after the Roman Empire fell. The Byzantine Empire was a Christian Empire and at least in its early days taught a form of Christianity closer to something we would recognize. At the Emory Museum a couple of years ago, I saw a baptistry from the 6th Century Byzantine Era that was like a tub that people crouched down in and had water poured over them. The museum display indicated people were baptized only after a period of intense Bible study. Eventually Orthodox Christianity wandered away from closely following the Bible and the combination of Church and State corrupted the church. But God’s true kingdom – His church of true disciples of Jesus - endured and prevailed and continues to this day.

v.18 announces that after the raging of the nations, the time has come for God's wrath, for judgment, for rewarding His servants and for destroying the destroyers. The time of waiting has ended. The time of warning has ended. The opportunity to repent was given and rejected. God's final judgment is about to unfold. In contrast to the silence in heaven when the 7th seal was opened in Rev 8:1, the sounding of the 7th trumpet is accompanied in v.19 with great noise. We have tremendous expectation that God is about to act powerfully and decisively.

One way to look at the fantastic images of Rev 4-19 is like a play with 2 acts. We have just finished Act 1. The Act began with a vision of God on His throne in glory and majesty. The scroll of 7 seals appears and is opened by the Lamb seal by seal with manifestations of the mighty power of God. The martyrs ask the key question about receiving justice and are told to wait until the full persecution is completed. The 144,000 are sealed with protection. 6 trumpets sound warnings and partial judgments, but Rome refuses to repent. A second scroll appears with further prophesy and an announcement that the wait is finally over. The 2 witnesses complete their testimony and are killed. The 7th and last trumpet sounds signaling God's final judgment. Amid great fanfare, the curtain falls on Act 1 and we wait for Act 2 to begin. Let's pray.