



ONE PLUS GOD

**Get going: We don't have forever to get into forever
A study on Revelation**

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**Week 6
The Church has a Mission**

One Plus God Ministries

Missions Minded, Every Day, Everywhere.

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Revelation: Lesson plan

Lesson 1 — September 3 — Who is Jesus? (Rev 1)

Lesson 2 — September 10 — What Jesus expects from His Church, part 1 (Rev 2 & 3)

Lesson 3 — September 17 — What Jesus expects from His Church, part 2 (Rev 2 & 3)

Lesson 4 — September 24 — In the throne room with God: Father, Lamb, and Spirit (Rev 4 & 5)

Lesson 5 — October 1 — Judgement and Grace (Rev 6 & 7)

Lesson 6 — October 8 — The Church has a mission (Rev 8 to 11)

Lesson 7 — October 15 — The Christmas-story through the eyes of Revelation (Rev 12)

Lesson 8 — October 22 — Evil attempting to imitate God (Rev 13)

Lesson 9 — October 29 — Time for grace will run out... (Rev 14 to 16)

Lesson 10 — November 5 — The efforts of Darkness will intensify, yet come to an end (Rev 17-18)

Lesson 11 — November 12 — God's triumph over a one-sided war (Rev 19 to 20)

Lesson 12 — November 19 — God's complete reign is coming soon! (Rev 21 to 22)

Revelation 8:1-5, Don't stop praying!

This chapter starts with a dramatic pause - silence in heaven for half an hour (v. 1)! According to the daily sacrifices in the temple a moment of silence preceded the burnt offering. Not only is a precious connection with God about to follow, but also the announcement of the following judgements.

Even though the next series of judgements through the 7 trumpets are ready to announced (v. 2), the focus is first on the prayers of the believers (vv. 3-4)! Again the believers are first being encouraged by the assurance that their prayers are not only reaching the presence of God, but that it is actually also heard. The symbolism of "much incense" that must have had a very distinct smell is clearly bringing this message (Ps. 141:2). God would most certainly not miss the smoke from all this incense (v. 4), just as He would not miss one single prayer (see also Numbers 16:6-7, as well as Eph. 5:2 and Phil. 4:18). He also answers immediately in a mighty, sovereign, righteous way (v. 5; see also Ex. 19:16, 18).

Believers should know: Don't stop praying! Every prayer is worth praying, and every prayer is being heard, because every prayer is like a wonderful fragrance to God!

Revelation 8:6-13, Judgements with a great intensity

While the 7 seals only covered 1/4 of the earth, the trumpets now hit 1/3 of creation (vv. 7-12)! There is clearly a progressing intensity. It is important to remember that Revelation is far less concerned with providing a chronological series of events, than rather presenting a chronological flow of themes! In this case the seals, trumpets, and bowls are all representing one theme of judgements, but with the symbolic references to 1/4 (seals), 1/3 (trumpets) and

total destruction of the bowls...as well as the break in textual structure between the 6th and 7th seals/trumpets and no break between the 6th and 7th bowls...we cannot miss the progressing intensity of how this theme of judgement is unfolding between the first and second coming of Christ.

To understand this seems to be most important—probably even more so than trying to figure out every detail of the metaphors used to describe the contents of the unfolding judgements. We are therefore not going to dive into extreme detail of each trumpet (or bowl later on).

It is striking to notice the scope of the judgement—now even including nature (vv. 7-12). This is a reminder that God has all the power, especially also over His creation (Psalm 147:17, 148:8). Hail was seen as heavy weapons of judgement (v. 7; Job 38:22-23), also in future judgement (Isaiah 28:17, 30:30; Ezek. 13:11, 13). The same would be true of fire and blood as signs of judgement (v. 7; Joel 2:30-31; Isaiah 9:4-5; Ezek. 21:32). Interestingly enough this does make one think of the red sand of the Sahara desert that would sometimes color the rain, or even volcanic eruptions from the Aegean Sea.

Even the mountains (huge ones), that would usually be signs of stability and steadfastness in the Bible, and the “roots of the earth” according to some ancient believes, are now struck (v. 8a). We know that the mountains can tremble in the presence of God (Jer. 4:24; Nahum 1:5), and God can struck mountains with fire (Deut. 32:22; Ps. 83:14). The blazing mountain also reminds one of the volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD.

With the living creatures in the sea dying and ships being destroyed (v. 9) a huge source of income and jobs for the “important” Roman Empire would quickly come into jeopardy! What could seem so secure today, can be shaken to the core by God tomorrow...?! The judgements are a reminder to keep our priorities and our focus straight!

The judgements continue to grow in intensity even just as we read on through verses 10-11. Water, especially from fountains in semi-desert areas like Palestine, is life-giving, so when this turns undrinkable it is obviously disastrous! This star/meteorite has a name, “Wormwood”, and turns the water bitter/poisonous. An intense judgement indeed. One is reminded of the bitter plant, *Artemisia Absinthium*, used to contain worms in somebody’s intestines...

This is followed by darkness (v. 12), a well-known metaphor for judgement and evil (Job 12:22; John 3:18-21). It is important and encouraging to remember that God is in control of both: light and darkness (see also Isaiah 45:7 and Amos 8:9)! The emphasis on the Godly sanction of these events is undeniable (v. 13). A last thought: In the Greek text the word for eagle and vulture (*aetos*) is the same, and people made no distinction between the two (here in v. 13 we would prefer “eagle”, because eagles were seen by the Greeks as messengers of the gods). So,

therefore the same eagle that announces the first “woe” is also the vulture sharing in the gruesome feast of Rev. 19:17 and 21 (of course in direct opposition to the meal of Rev. 19:9)!

Revelation 9:1-11, More judgements—now directly against evil.

While the first 4 trumpets affect the world people are living in, the 5th and 6th trumpets are directed against evil itself. Rev. 9:1 requires from us to remember that “stars” were often seen as “angels” in the ancient world (Judges 5:20 and Job 38:7). In this case this messenger of God comes to unlock the place of the dead, more specifically the residence of evil (Rev. 13:1, 20:1-3; Luke 8:31). A terrifying judgement is set into motion as locusts with the power of scorpions are released from the smoke (v. 3). All of these images are very typical of judgement language (see for instance Joel 1:2-2:11; Ex. 10:14-15; 1 Kings 12:11, 14). However, they are in this case only to harm those who do not belong to God (v. 4)! So, sometimes the children of God (as we have seen with the souls of the martyrs) are being caught in the “crossfire” we might say, but then we are also so very often reminded that God is in control, and can and will also completely protect you when He decides so...how encouraging in the midst of these scary judgements?! And not only this, God is also in control of the time frame: They are only to bring harm (not kill) for exactly 5 months (v. 5), which would compare to the life cycle of a locust! The sting is so bad that the unbelievers are, as in Rev. 6:15-16, longing for death, but it will elude them...God is surely the One who is in control of life and death (v. 6)!

With Joel 1:6-7 and 2:4-5 in the background the metaphor continues in v. 7: The devastating effect of the plague of locusts looks like an army of war horses coming to destroy everything,

and they even have the given power to do so (crowns of gold)! This evil comes disguised as humans (v. 7c), and has tremendous strength: Long hair (which in the ancient world was often connected with strength and not only with gender), teeth like a lions' (v. 8), breastplates of iron, wings making a terrifying noise (v. 9), as well as those tails stinging people continuously (not only once) for 5 months (v. 10)! However, God is still in control: The angel of death (Abyss), the destroyer (Abaddon/Apollyon), is reigning over the underworld (v. 11).

Revelation 9:12-21, In the midst of it all God still has a heart for the lost!

Once again we start from God's perspective in Rev. 9:13! When we compare the altar with Rev. 14:18, 16:7 and 19:5 it is clear that it is God's voice coming from here (v. 13). This is God answering to the prayers of the believers from Rev. 6:10 and 8:3-5. The sixth angel is releasing the four angels at a very specific time (v. 15), and from across the eastern border of the Roman Empire, the Euphrates river (v. 14), now comes an army of horses and riders, like the feared Parthian Empire whose main striking force was its heavy cavalry, with man and horse covered with armor (v. 17). Yet, no matter how fierce and tremendously scary they might appear, they can still only use their given power (v. 19) to strike at a 1/3 of mankind (v. 18; see also Is. 30:33; Ezek. 38:22). See especially the Satanic intent now becoming a clearer part of these metaphors, with the power specifically in their snake-like tails (v. 19)! Can you see how the intensity of these judgements are increasing?

The purpose of this intense, progression of judgements: So that 2/3 would have time to repent and be saved! Yet, the unthinkable happens...they don't (vv. 20-21). They continue to worship demons and idols, to murder, be a part of magic/sorcery, sexual immorality and stealing... How sad?!

It seems they got stuck in this lifestyle...

It seems like time is of the essence... We need to live with a sense of urgency! The message needs to get out, before people get stuck in an evil rut!

Revelation 10:1-7, Time is running out...

A mighty angel, acting under the influence of God’s glory and power (v. 1), now continues to lay out with great authority over all (his feet victoriously planted on sea and land), more of the contents of the scroll that we encountered in chapter 5 (v. 2). With an amazing roar (reminding us of God’s great power in Hos. 11:10) this angel spoke with thunder (Psalm 29), yet...we will never know the contents of this series of 7 thunders... (vv. 3-4)?!

Why?

Time’s up...!! No more delays (v. 6)!!

This is also a great reminder that even though God shows us what is to come, even though the scroll lays “open” (v. 2), we should remember, God still stays sovereign! Never will we ever have every little detail perfectly figured out—this theological truth will be a huge help when we get closer to the end of Revelation trying to interpret some of the events and time lines (that we so often like to struggle with, and if I may add...mostly unnecessarily so, and only to our own frustration). Furthermore...this should also be a huge help to remember simply as we continue through the normal day-to-day battles of life... It is so important to stay focused, so

important to live missional, so important to have our priorities straight, so important to stay connected with God, so important to make a lasting difference every day, everywhere...

Why?

Time's up...!! Verses 6-7: "Then the angel...**raised his right hand to heaven**. And he **swore by Him Who lives for ever and ever**, Who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said...

'THERE WILL BE NO MORE DELAY!'"

Would you believe it now...?

Now is the time, right now, that God will accomplish what God wants to accomplish (v. 7)! And what is this Godly mystery? Of course, that which was "announced" (Greek - *euangelion*) to the prophets: The Message, the Good News of salvation!

Revelation 10:9-11, Sharing the Good News is not always a sweet thing

Ezekiel 2:9-3:3 is clearly in the background, as also he had to take the scroll and had to eat it, so that he could go and share the Word of God with a rebellious nation (vv. 8-9). While this wonderful Message of Good News is tasted it is obviously great, and wonderful...sweet as honey (v. 9; see also Ps. 119:103; Prov. 24:13-14; Jer. 15:16). This however is the easy part of our journey as the Church of the living God (v. 10a).

Far more difficult is when the Church realizes that she has a mission; far more difficult is when believers realize they should be on a mission, every day, everywhere! When they realize this Message of Good Hope, of Life, of Salvation should be shared, then they will also quickly encounter that it is not always a sweet thing to do... In fact, as the Message becomes part of our daily lives, as we digest it, we might experience that our stomachs turn sour (v. 10b)!

Remember, the whole idea of the Message is that it needs to get out there—to whom...to all..."many peoples, nations, languages and kings" (v. 11)!

Revelation 11:1-14, The Church has a Mission

Chapter 11 is continuing the theme that was already started in chapter 10: The Church has a Mission, and that Mission is to bring God’s Word to the nations!

This chapter however starts of by first encouraging the believers again with the knowledge that they belong to God! So, as they get ready to head out with this task that sometimes end up not being so very “sweet”, but might actually even turn “sour” on them, they should remember that God is protecting them (v. 1). As in Ezekiel 40-42 and Zechariah 2:1-5 measurements of the temple, the altar, and the counting of worshipers are all imagery emphasizing that the believers belong to the Family of God, and that they are therefore under the protection of the Father of this Family. This is even more special in the light of Rev. 21:15-21, where the heavenly Jerusalem is being measured: The Church in Rev. 11:1 actually becomes symbolically a shadow of the victorious Church in chapter 21!

For the non-believers though, the picture is a lot less appealing: Although they are allowed to persecute the Church for a specific period of 42 months (v. 2b), they will not do this under God’s protection as they are excluded from the outer court of the temple, and will therefore not be “measured” (v. 2a). A word about the background to the 42 months may be helpful. This period of 42 months (or three and a half years) is also referred to later on in terms of 1260 days (v. 3, 12:6), or even three and a half “days” (vv. 9 and 11). This goes back to a time of extreme suffering for the Jewish nation (Daniel 7:25, 9:27, 12:7-12). A Syrian ruler, Antiochus IV Epiphanes relentlessly aggravated the Jewish nation for a period of roughly three and a half years (167-164 BC), with the peak of it being when he erected an altar to Zeus in the Jewish temple and started sacrificing pigs on it!

The Church (two witnesses) however, needs to know that exactly because the believers are acting under the Hand of God, they should not retreat, but should continue boldly with their testifying Mission for the exact same period of time of 1,260 days or 42 months, constantly calling people to repentance (sackcloth; v. 3). The two witnesses is clearly referring to the Church, as Old Testament references, but also the context of chapter 11 helps us to understand. The two witnesses are like two olive trees and two lamp stands (Zech. 4:2-6), fulfilling their Mission as kings (Zerubbabel was the Jewish governor) and priests (Joshua was the high priest) in the presence of the Lord, powered by the Holy Spirit—they are indeed never on their own with this Mission! And now it is also clear...the Church and its Mission cannot be separated: A Church that is not a testifying Church, cannot be “Church” anymore...!

The two witnesses also reminds one of Deut. 19:15 where two are necessary to bring someone to righteous judgement. The Church is therefore acting within God’s law if believers challenge people about their sin, and encouraging them to reach out for salvation in Christ, so that they can be declared free of sin, and children of God! Furthermore, when one looks at vv. 5-6 the two witnesses also remind us of Elijah and Moses. Their actions become an example to how the Church should continue to live a bold testimony to the honor of God (see 2 Kings 1:10; 1 Kings 17-18; Ex. 7:20-21). The Church can be just as powerful in testifying and performing miracles!

The Church needs to know though that their testimony will be met with fierce retaliation (v. 7). However, even though they may die (v. 7), and get humiliated (vv. 8a, 9), it is nothing more than what happened to our own Lord (v. 8b)... Most importantly: Even though the nonbelievers will even rejoice for a short period (v. 10), thinking that they had been victorious, victory will surely come to the *believers*, at the precise, divine appointed moment (v. 11a), when they will rise from the dead (v. 11b), bring terror upon the nonbelievers (v. 11c), and join God (v. 12a), while the nonbelievers will not only be in terror (v. 11c), but won’t be able to believe their own eyes (v. 12b)!

This passage ends with an incredible message of hope: The Mission of the God and His Church will surely lead to unprecedented repentance (v. 13)!

And once again the urgency is there: The one woe as passed, and the next will be soon (v. 14)!

Revelation 11:15-19, The seventh trumpet...only after quite a break!

It is indeed undeniable that the seventh trumpet is only sounded after an encouraging and challenging break in the text! It did not follow the sixth trumpet at the end of chapter 9, but only appears again here at the end of chapter 11! Once more: God truly wants the effect of the judgements to be that people would use the period of grace to come to repentance—He does not want anyone to be lost, but saved!

The seventh trumpet is also concluding Revelation 4:1-11:19 structurally. Chapter 4 started with God on His throne in glory and majesty, and chapter 12 will start with the devil trying to claim the same... It should therefore come as no surprise that the seventh trumpet announces one more time that God and Christ's rule should be acknowledged (vv. 15-18), because that is how it will most certainly be. This is such a certainty that v. 17 even (intentionally) neglects to mention "...is to come"!

God is now present with His people (v. 19a), but there is also complete reconciliation as the ark of His covenant (v. 19b) is finally visible to all. This is a powerful moment (v. 19c)!

Resources

Today we were challenged to be a Church with a Mission. Sometimes this means that we do what God is calling us to do right where we are at, and other times it means that we need to go somewhere else to fulfill that Mission! The book, “Mary Slessor: Forward into Calabar”, by Janet & Geoff Benge, is a book about Mary’s life. She prayed at 27 this prayer: “God, send me somewhere, anywhere, just send me to be a missionary.” Well, God did, and for the next 39 years Mary worked amongst the unreached tribes of Africa’s Calabar region. She became the “White Ma” to many people, stopping at nothing to reach the lost with the Gospel—indeed a woman on a Mission for God!

This is available in a Kindle version on Amazon.

Want to dig deeper, or just stay connected?

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