

The Book of Revelation

Session 6 - God's Ancient Promises Fulfilled (Chapters 10-11)

Book Overview

Chapters 6-9 described God's judgements coming upon the earth. Chapters 10-11 take a small step back and introduce us to another layer of this story - God fulfilling His promises to Israel - before concluding the main action of the story as Jesus returns and triumphs over His enemies.

Chapter Overview

These chapters can be divided into three sections:

1. John's Call to Prophecy (Revelation 10)
2. Judgement and Repentance in Israel (Revelation 11:1-14)
3. The Return of Jesus (Revelation 11:15-19)

In Deuteronomy 32 Moses teaches the Israelites a song that tells their whole story, from God first calling them to God's future deliverance and cleansing of them. This song of Moses helps us understand this passage of scripture in Revelation and see that through all that is going on God is fulfilling His ancient promises to Israel:

1. Moses prophesies a time of great calamity falling upon Israel for their unfaithfulness to God (Deuteronomy 32:22-27). In the same way, John describes great calamity coming upon the earth preceding Jesus' return (Revelation 6-9), using similar descriptions:
 - a. Burning (Deuteronomy 32:22, Revelation 8:7)
 - b. Famine and plague (Deuteronomy 32:24, Revelation 6:5-8)
 - c. Death (Deuteronomy 32:25, Revelation 6:8, 9:15)
2. Moses likens Israel's sinfulness to that of Sodom and Gomorrah (Deuteronomy 32:32). In the same way, John describes the spiritual state of the city of Jerusalem as being like that of Sodom and Egypt in the days of Jesus' return (Revelation 11:8).
3. Moses sees a time coming where God will avenge the sin of His people and the whole world (Deuteronomy 32:35). In the same way, John describes this time period as being a time of God's vengeance (Revelation 6:10, 11:18).
4. Moses is convinced that in the end God will vindicate and save Israel, and that all along His judgements have been to bring about repentance (Deuteronomy 32:36,43). In the same way, John sees a time of repentance in Israel before Jesus returns as a result of His judgements (Revelation 11:13).
5. Moses hears Jesus lift his hand to heaven and swear by Himself, who lives forever, that He will judge the world (Deuteronomy 32:40-42). In the same way, John sees a mighty angel lift his hand to heaven and swear by God, who lives forever, that God's purposes will be accomplished with no more delay (Revelation 10:5-7).

John's Call to Prophecy (Revelation 10)

Verse 1:

"Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven" - The term 'mighty angel' is used three times in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 5:2, 18:21). An angel with great power and authority.

"He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars" - The description of this angel is similar to the description of Jesus in Revelation 1:15-16 and God in Revelation 4:3-5. This angel reflects God's glory. His description also reminds us of God's power to deliver and protect amidst trouble - Noah (Genesis 9:12-16) and Israel (Exodus 13:21-22).

Verse 2:

"He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand" - The message of this scroll is for everyone - unlike the scroll which the Lamb of God took (Revelation 5:7).

"He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land" - John is emphasising God's sovereignty and authority over the whole earth (Jonah 1:9, Haggai 2:6).

Verse 3-4:

"He gave a loud shout... when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down'" - There is still much revelation God will give His people as we approach the time of Jesus' return. Yet we trust that we do not need anything more than He has given us in His word.

Verse 5-7:

"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! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets'" - See Deuteronomy 32:40-42. This is the appointed time of God's wrath where all His purposes for Israel and the whole earth will all be fulfilled. God's work is finally coming to an end (Exodus 20:11)

Verse 8:

"Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel" - John is invited, as we are, to understand and partner with God's eternal purposes.

Verse 9:

"Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey" - God's words are sweet (Psalm 19:10, 119:103) but to enter into His heart is to share His griefs as well as His joy. This is similar to Ezekiel 3. The scroll was sweet but living out its message was hard.

Verse 11:

"Then I was told 'You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings'"
- Just like Ezekiel, John is charged with preaching this message - the message found in Deuteronomy 32 - that God's wrath is against Israel and the rest of the world (Romans 2:9) but that this time of wrath will result in salvation for Jews and Gentiles alike (Romans 2:10, 11:26)

Judgement and Repentance in Israel (Revelation 11:1-14)

Verse 1:

"I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, 'Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, with its worshippers'" - John is now given more understanding of how and why he is to prophesy. In Ezekiel 40-42 an angel measures the temple in preparation for God's returning glory - emphasising its perfection - yet here the purpose of measuring is to discern its sinfulness. The angel wants John - and us - to understand the spiritual state of Israel so we can better understand God's judgements.

Verse 2:

"But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles" - Such is Israel's sinfulness the outer court has been completely given over to the Gentiles. In this vision God wants John to discern only Israel's sins.

"They will trample on the holy city for 42 months" - Jesus spoke of Jerusalem being trampled by Gentiles (Luke 21:24). God's holy city - Jerusalem - which He set apart for Himself (Psalm 132:13-14) is now under wrath and judgement because of Israel's sin. This time period of 42 months (3½ years, 1,260 days) is a repeated period of time in the end-time story (Revelation 11:2,3, 12:6,14, 13:5, Daniel 9:27). There will be great trouble and distress in the city of Jerusalem in the time preceding Jesus' return.

Verse 3:

"I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth" - God will raise up two prophets to Jerusalem. These are real people, as John describes their clothing (Revelation 11:3), their deaths (Revelation 11:7-10), their resurrections (Revelation 11:11) and their ascension to heaven (Revelation 11:12). They are in mourning over the sins of Israel and will preach a message of repentance.

Verse 4:

"They are 'the two olive trees' and the two lampstands, and they 'stand before the Lord of the earth'" - Zechariah spoke of two olive trees whose function was to keep the golden lampstand of Israel's light burning (Zechariah 4:1-14). In Zechariah's day this was a clear picture of Joshua and Zerubbabel, who God appointed to rebuild Israel both physically and spiritually. John sees that they were foreshadowing the Two Witnesses who God will appoint in the last days to minister to Israel.

Verse 5:

"If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies" - John is already using figurative language to describe the Two Witnesses so this could be literal fire or still figurative (Jeremiah 5:14). Either way, they will walk in great power and be hated both by Israel and Israel's enemies.

Verse 6:

"They have power to shut up the heavens... to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague" - These Two Witnesses are likened to two of Israel's greatest prophets, Elijah and Moses. They will be known in the days to come as two of Israel's most important prophets, who played a huge part in finally leading Israel to full and lasting repentance.

Verse 7:

"Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them" - They will be killed only when God allows it. The beast is a reference to the antichrist - the most evil man who's ever lived who will be leading the final war on Israel and God's church in the midst of all of this. The greatest 'conqueror' (Revelation 6:2).

Verse 8:

"Their bodies will lie in the public square of the great city - which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt - where also their Lord was crucified" - There is no doubt where this action is taking place. But John is emphasising Jerusalem's sinfulness. 'Great city' is a term always used in scripture to describe cities opposed to God. John likes Jerusalem to Sodom and Egypt such is their sin.

Verse 9-10:

"Some from every people... will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial... will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth" - These Two Witnesses will not be buried, signifying how hated they were. Their ministry will overlap with the trumpet judgements so it's very plausible that they will be seen as responsible at least in part for the trouble on the earth. The earth will celebrate their deaths - and the one who killed them - because they think it marks the end of this time of trouble.

Verse 11:

"But after the three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them" - Their physical resurrection speaks prophetically of Israel's coming spiritual resurrection (Ezekiel 37:10-14). At this point the story switches tense, indicating we're rejoining the action from chapter 9. Everything is coming to a climax - the influence and outworking of the seals and the trumpet judgements of God.

Verse 12:

“And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on” - Similar to Elijah (2 Kings 2:11) and Enoch (Genesis 5:24).

Verse 13:

“At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven” - The final result of all this trouble in Jerusalem is repentance (Zechariah 12:10, Romans 11:26), just as Moses prophesied (Deuteronomy 32:36,43). Israel will call upon the name of Jesus, ushering forth His return (Matthew 23:39) where He will bring everlasting peace to Jerusalem and the whole earth (Isaiah 4:2-6, Psalm 46:8-10, 110:1-7).

Verse 14:

“The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon” - All that’s now left is for the final trumpet, which will bring to completion the seven seals and the seven trumpets.

The Return of Jesus (Revelation 11:15-19)

Verse 15:

“The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever’” - The seventh trumpet marks the great finale of the story when Jesus comes back. Chapters 6-11 have told the story from heaven’s perspective, hence why heaven’s response is emphasised in these few verses rather than Jesus’ physical return.

- a. At the seventh trumpet the mystery of God will be accomplished (Revelation 10:7)
- b. At the last trumpet the dead will be raised (1 Corinthians 15:52)
- c. Jesus will come back with a trumpet blast and we will be gathered to Him (1 Thessalonians 4:17, Matthew 24:31)
- d. In the Fall of Jericho, seven priests with seven trumpets marched around the city for seven days. On the seventh day they marched around seven times and the battle was won (Joshua 5:13-6:27). This is an amazing prophetic picture for the seven seals and seven trumpets, which will bring about the final demise of darkness.

Verse 16:

“And the twenty-four elders... fell on their faces and worshipped God” - Just as they did in Revelation 5:14. God’s purposes have been fulfilled at last.

Verse 17:

“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign” - God’s title has changed (Revelation 1:4,8, 4:8) because He has now come.

Verse 18:

“The nations were angry, and your wrath has come” - The elders remind us of the state of humanity, full of anger and hatred towards God (Psalm 2). Yet God’s wrath has come (Isaiah 2:10-21, 11:4, Jeremiah 25:30-38, Habakkuk 3:8-15, Zephaniah 1) and His purposes have prevailed.

“The time has come for judging the living and the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people who revere your name, both great and small - and for destroying those who destroy the earth” - The time of final judgement has come upon the earth (Matthew 13:47-50, 16:27, 25:31-46, 1 Corinthians 4:5). We learn later in the Book of Revelation that this time of reward and punishment will not all come at once - Jesus will reign for a thousand years with those who died in Him, before everyone else is raised and brought before His throne (Revelation 20:11-15). There is no turning back for anyone at this point (Isaiah 55:6).

Verse 19:

“Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a severe hailstorm” - The time for God’s glory to fill the earth has come. His faithfulness and holiness will be made known to the whole earth, through Jesus’ return and through Israel’s deliverance (Ezekiel 37:28, 39:7-8, 21-29).

Summary

These chapters fulfil the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 in four ways:

1. John sees great disaster coming upon Israel and Jerusalem (Revelation 11:6,13)
2. John sees Israel’s sinfulness at its fullness (Revelation 11:8)
3. John sees this time period as being a time of God’s vengeance (Revelation 11:18)
4. John sees Israel being brought to repentance (Revelation 11:13)

These chapters reveal four aspects to the ministry of the Two Witnesses:

1. They will witness primarily in Jerusalem (Revelation 10:8)
2. They will move in the power and authority of Moses and Elijah (Revelation 10:6)
3. Their primary ministry will be to spiritually restore Israel back to God (Revelation 10:3-4)
4. They will be hated by all the earth (Revelation 10:9-10)

These chapters highlight four enduring promises of God that will be fulfilled when Jesus returns at the final trumpet:

1. The earth will be brought under God’s leadership (Revelation 11:17)
2. Those who hate Jesus will be punished (Revelation 11:14,18)
3. Those who love Jesus will be rewarded (Revelation 11:18)
4. Israel will be delivered (Revelation 10:13)