

07. Apocalypse 7:9 – 11:14

The Transcendent (7:9 – 8:6)

Scene 3 : Six Trumpets are sounded (8:7 – 9:21)

Interlude (10:1 – 11:14)



Penetrating to THE TRANSCENDENT (3)

I. The goal of history (7:9-17)

In the previous scene, John focused attention on those on earth who are living Christ's life and who are his instruments in effecting God's reign. They are protected against the judgment that must come upon those who are opposing God's will.

Now he invites his readers to contemplate reality with the eyes of faith. He presents those who, beyond time and space and the tribulations he is about to reveal (7:14), have finally conquered, and are enjoying the eternal communion of heaven.

Apocalypse 7:9-10

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, **standing before the throne and before the Lamb**, robed in **white** festive robes, with **palm branches** in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!’

They come from every part of the world (compare 5:9), ‘**standing before the throne**’, ready to carry out God’s will, and in communion with the crucified and risen Christ (‘**the Lamb**’, see 5:6). They are in **white** festive robes because they share in the luminous splendour of the glorified Jesus (see 1:14). The just will suffer, but their suffering is a participation in the passion and death of Christ. They therefore share in his glory. This is the eternal life promised by God to those who follow Jesus.

Apocalypse 7:11-12

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four animal-like creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, singing ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen!’

The palm branches signify that they have reached the oasis at the end of their desert journey (see Exodus 15:27). The saints are gathered in God’s heavenly temple, enjoying an eternal liturgy of remembrance and praise. The ‘**angels around the throne**’ participate in the exercise of God’s active reign on earth and so their worshipping of God is an invitation to the liturgical assembly to join in worship.

The second **Amen** represents the response of the Christian assembly.

Apocalypse 7:13-14

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, ‘Who are these, robed in **white festive robes**, and where have they come from?’ I said to him, ‘Sir, you know’.

Then he said to me, ‘These are they coming out of the great ordeal [persecution, 1:7]; they have washed their robes and made them **white in the blood** of the Lamb.’

The priests of the cult of Cybele, the earth mother, washed in bull’s blood in order to enjoy communion with the goddess. The disciples of Jesus wash in the blood that Jesus poured out for them (see 5:9-10, next slide).

They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Apocalypse 5:9-10:

They (‘the four animal-like creatures and the 24 elders’) sing a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.”

Purified by Jesus, they enjoy communion with him (hence ‘white’, see 1:14). Being made ‘white’ in ‘blood’ alerts us to the fact that the symbolism is intellectual, not visual.

Apocalypse 7:15-17

For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the One who is seated on the throne will pitch his tent over them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will shepherd them, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

They enjoy God's protection and are fully satisfied through their communion in God's love.

'They shall feed along the ways, on all the bare heights shall be their pasture; they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them'(Isaiah 49:9-10).

God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

‘The Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces’(Isaiah 25:8)

2. The 7th seal & 7 trumpets (Apocalypse 8:1-6)

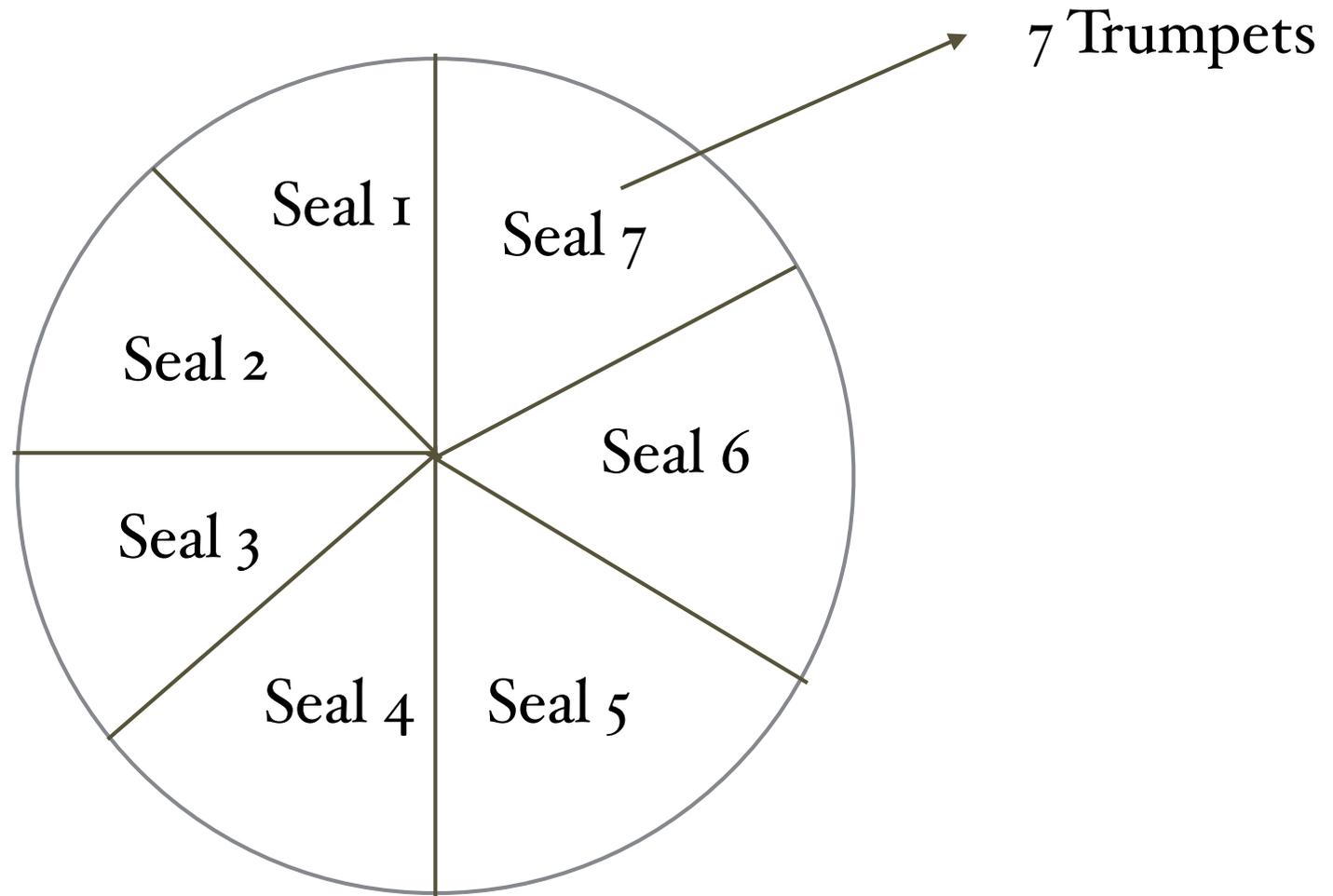
Apocalypse 8:1

When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour [real time!].

This is the moment for which all have been waiting: the opening of the seventh and final seal. Now the whole scroll of history is unrolled, and, thanks to Christ the Lamb (see 5:6), we can see its ultimate meaning. The drama of the moment is intensified by the solemn silence in heaven

Apocalypse 8:2

I saw the seven angels who stand before God,
and seven trumpets were given to them.



Apocalypse 8:2

I saw the seven angels who stand before God,
and seven trumpets were given to them.

The seven angels symbolise all the ways in which the transcendent God communicates with creation. The trumpets (the shofar) announce the presence of the Lord, the divine warrior. It is the Lord's summons to battle, as well as a call to repentance. John is about to present the terrible plague that Roman oppression is bringing on the world. He is pleading with the Christians: 'Can't you see what is happening. Repent! Change your way of looking at things! Wake up before it is too late!'

Apocalypse 8:3

Another angel with a golden censer came and stood on the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne.

Apocalypse 1:12-13

‘I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lamp stands, and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest.

Apocalypse 8:3-6

And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth; and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake. Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets made ready to blow them.

The Christian communities are being asked to pray that they will not be caught up in the terrible destruction that is happening all around them. John assures them that their prayer will rise like incense to God (see 5:8). We recall the plea of the psalmist: 'Let my prayers be counted as incense before you'(Psalm 141:2).

Review : Apocalypse 5:1 – 8:6

Only the Crucified and Risen Christ [the Lamb] can break the seven seals and disclose the meaning of history (5:5)

Seals 1-4
6:1-8
Nature

The just
are secure
with God (7)

Seal 7

‘When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour’(8:1)

Seals 5-6
6:9-17
History

God’s judgment is proclaimed in 7 stages
– 7 Trumpets (8:2)

‘The seven angels who had the seven trumpets made ready to blow them’(8:6)

Divine Judgment : announced by 7 trumpets (Apocalypse 8:7 – 11:15)

Trumpets 1-4
Judgment
is cosmic
8:7-12

Martyrdom and Reward
of Christian Leaders
(10:1 - 11:14)

Trumpet 7

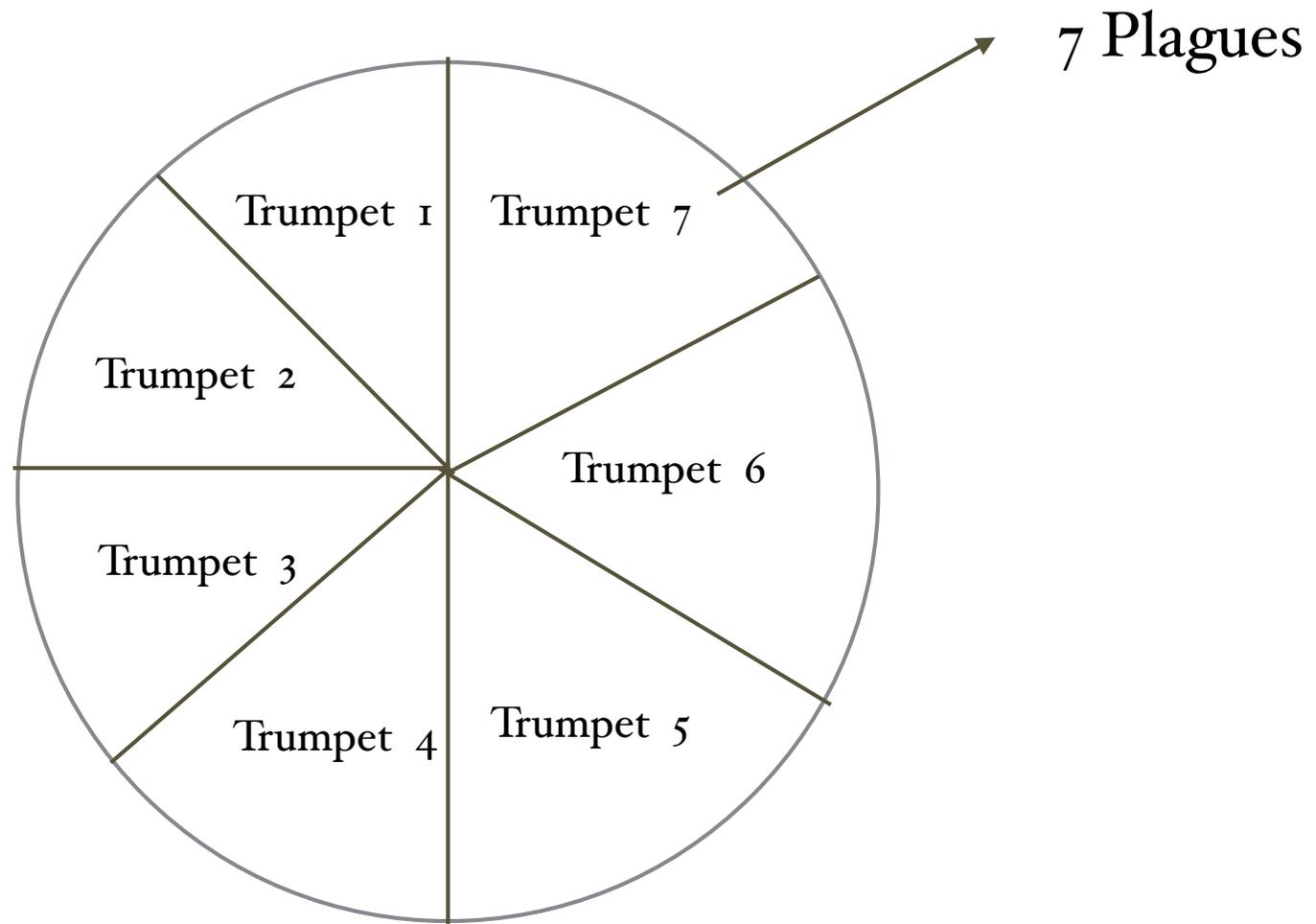
‘Then the
7th angel blew
his trumpet’
(11:15)

Trumpets 5-6
War &
Natural
Disasters
9:1-21

God’s judgment is carried out in
7 stages – 7 Plagues (15:1)

Apocalypse 8:2

I saw the seven angels who stand before God,
and seven trumpets were given to them.



SCENE 3 : Six trumpets are sounded : Apocalypse 8:7 – 9:21

Apocalypse 8:7

The first angel blew his trumpet, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were hurled to the earth; and a third of the earth was burnt up, and a third of the trees were burned up and all green grass was burned up.

Just as the first four seals formed a unit (6:1-8), so do the first four trumpets (see also 16:1-9 for the first four basins). The first announcement concerns the earth. The destruction, here and in the following verses, is not total ('a third', see Ezekiel 5:1-17).

Hail recalls the seventh plague of Egypt (Exodus 9:23-26)

Apocalypse 8:8-9

The **second angel** blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the **sea**.

A third of the sea became blood a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

The second announcement concerns the sea, for Rome was a maritime power.

The sea becoming blood recalls the first plague of Egypt (Exodus 7:20).

Apocalypse 8:10-11

The **third angel** blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many died from the water, because it was made bitter.

To understand the third announcement we need to familiarise ourselves with the cosmology of the time according to which the earth and the sea was surrounded by a vast ocean. It was understood that it was the waters of this ocean which fell from above in the form of rain, and welled up from below in rivers and springs. Fresh water, too, is being polluted. Wormwood, a bitter herb, is frequently used in the Bible as a symbol for sorrow. We are reminded of the bitter waters at Marah during the desert wanderings of the Israelites (Exodus 15:23).

Apocalypse 8:12

The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun [9th plague, Exodus 10:21] was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light was darkened; a third of the day was kept from shining, and likewise the night.

The fourth announcement concerns the heavens, thus completing the cosmic extension of John's thought. It also recalls the ninth plague of Egypt (Exodus 10:21).

Apocalypse 8:13

The eagle and the three woes

Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew in midheaven, 'Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow.'

The eagle is flying in the highest part of the heavens. His message is from the transcendent God. Our eyes and ears are completely focused on the eagle and his message. It is a solemn warning to those who give their lives to the imperial cult and all that goes with it. John injects special dramatic tension into the scene, preparing us for the terrible final three announcements.

Apocalypse 9:1-12

The first 'Woe' : The demonic destructive power of war

Apocalypse 9:1-3

And the **fifth angel** blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from heaven to earth [demonic], and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit; he opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. Then from the smoke came **locusts** [8th plague, Exodus 10-:12] on the earth, and they [feminine!] were given authority [within divine providence] like the authority of scorpions on the earth.

War as demonic (fallen angel), opposing God, determined to re-establish chaos and bring about the destruction of humanity

Apocalypse 9:4-6 (War continued)

They were told not to damage the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads [7:3]. They were allowed to torture them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torture was like the torture of a scorpion when it stings someone. And in those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will flee from them.

The demonic power can destroy only ‘those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads’; that is to say, over those who fail to keep God before their eyes and love God with all their minds (see 7:1-8).

Its destructive power is limited (‘five months’; also 9:10)

Apocalypse 9:7-12 (War continued)

In appearance the locusts were like horses equipped for battle. On their heads were crowns with the likeness of gold; their faces were like human faces, their hair like women's hair [perversion of natural order], and their teeth like lion's teeth; they had scales like iron breastplates, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle.

They have tails like scorpions, with stingers, and in their tails is their power to harm people for five months. They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit [the devil]; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon [place of destruction], and in Greek he is called Apollyon [destroyer]. The first woe has passed. There are still two woes to come.

Demonic power works through human decisions, and has a human face. The 'power' is apparent ('like'), not real

Apocalypse 9:13-21 : The second 'Woe' [9:12; 11:14] Natural Disasters

Apocalypse 9:13-17

Then the **sixth angel** blew his trumpet and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river **Euphrates**' [frontier of Holy Land]. So the four (points of compass) **angels were released** (within divine providence) who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month and the year, to kill a **third** (limited: 8:7-12) of humankind. The number of the troops of cavalry was twice ten thousand times ten thousand [200,000,000]; I heard their number. And this was how I saw the horses in my vision: the riders wore breastplates the colour of fire and of hyacinth and of sulphur [changing colours of smoke billowing from a furnace]; the heads of the horses were like lion's heads, and fire and smoke and sulphur came out of their mouths.

Apocalypse 9:18-21

By these three plagues a third of humankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulphur coming out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they inflict harm.

The rest of humankind, who were not killed by these plagues,

- **did not repent** of the works of their hands or give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk,

[1st & 2nd commandments]

- **and they did not** repent of their murders or their sorceries or their fornication or their thefts [5th to 7th commandments].

See the following slides where Amos (4:4-12) speaks of people's failure to learn from natural disasters

Come to Bethel, and transgress; to Gilgal, and multiply transgression;
bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days;
bring a thank-offering of leavened bread,
and proclaim freewill offerings, publish them;
for so you love to do, O people of Israel! says the Lord YHWH.

I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities,
and lack of bread in all your places,
yet you did not return to me, says the Lord.

And I also withheld the rain from you
when there were still three months to the harvest;
I would send rain on one city, and send no rain on another city;
one field would be rained upon,
and the field on which it did not rain withered;
so two or three towns wandered to one town
to drink water, and were not satisfied;
yet you did not return to me, says the Lord.

I struck you with blight and mildew;
I laid waste your gardens and your vineyards;
the locust devoured your fig trees and your olive trees;
yet you did not return to me, says the Lord.

I sent among you a pestilence after the manner of Egypt;
I killed your young men with the sword; I carried away your horses;
and I made the stench of your camp go up into your nostrils;
yet you did not return to me, says the Lord.

I overthrew some of you,
as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah,
and you were like a brand snatched from the fire;
yet you did not return to me, says the Lord.

Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel;
because I will do this to you,
prepare to meet your God, O Israel!

INTERLUDE : Martyrdom and the reward of Christian leaders

Pause before the final revelation of the 7th trumpet

Apocalypse 10:1 - 11:12

Earlier in the Apocalypse, John paused before the breaking of the seventh seal to prepare his audience for the fact that however terrible the revelation coming with the breaking of the seventh seal, the victory of those faithful to Christ was assured (7:1-17). A similar effect is achieved by the interruption of the following passage. John wants to reassure his audience before they hear the final announcement of the risen Christ concerning God's judgment of mankind.

Apocalypse 10:1-4

And I saw another angel [herald from the exalted Christ], mighty [5:2], coming down from heaven [3:12], wrapped in a cloud [1:7], with a rainbow over his head [4:5]; his face was like the sun [1:16], and his legs like pillars of fire [Exodus 13:21]. He had a little scroll open in his hand [the last piece to be revealed]. Setting his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land [1:15], he gave a great shout [1:10], like a lion roaring. And when he shouted, the seven [1:4] thunders [beyond comprehension, 4:5] sounded.

When the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down’.

Apocalypse 10:5-8

Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and the land raised his right hand to heaven and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it: 'time should be no more, but in the days when the seventh angel is to blow his trumpet, the mystery of God [1:20] will be fulfilled, as he announced to his servants the prophets'. Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, 'Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land'.

'Go your way, Daniel, for the words are to remain secret and sealed until the time of the end'(Daniel 12:9).

The seventh seal has already been broken (8:1).

so the scroll is already open (10:2,8), but not yet announced.

Apocalypse 10:9-11

So I went to the angel and told him to give me the **little scroll** [10:2]; and he said to me, ‘Take it and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth’. So I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. Then they said to me, ‘You must prophesy again about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.’

The final meaning of history is to be announced only when the seventh trumpet sounds. This is imminent but it cannot happen till the prophet, John, has heard this final revelation and absorbed it properly (10:9). It is good news, tasting as sweet as honey; but it involves all the pain that goes with being a faithful disciple of him who was crucified.

Ezekiel 3:1-3

He said to me, O mortal, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. He said to me, Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey.

Apocalypse II:I-2

Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, ‘Come and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample over the holy city [People of God prior to the end] for 42 months [3.5 years = persecution].

Whatever is announced by the imminent seventh trumpet, no harm will come to the Christian community gathered in prayer. The holy city symbolises the people of God in the period before the end; namely, those who are in love with Christ and are awaiting the wedding feast. They will be subjected to persecution, but for a limited period. Persecution, however successful, is unable to put a stop to the divine communion of the faithful expressed in their cult.

Apocalypse 11:3-4

I will grant my two witnesses authority to prophesy for 1,260 [3.5 years] wearing sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lamp stands that stand before the Lord of the earth [leaders of local church].

The contents of the final revelation prior to the announcement of the seventh trumpet concerns two witnesses (Greek: martyrs, whence English 'martyr'), who are spoken of as olive trees and lamp stands. The allusion is to the prophecy of Zechariah who writes of:

'A lamp stand all of gold ... and by it there are two olive trees ... These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth'(Zechariah 4:2,3,14).

Zechariah is speaking of the high priest, Joshua, and the governor, Zerubbabel. John is speaking of the leaders of the local churches. In Rome: Peter and Paul?)

Apocalypse 11:5-6

If anyone wants to harm them (‘the two olive trees and the two lamp stands that stand before the Lord of the earth’), fire pours from their mouth [word of judgment] and consumes their foes; anyone who wants to harm them must be killed in this manner. They have authority to shut the sky, that no rain may fall [Elijah. 2Kings 1,10] during the days of their prophesying, and they have authority over the waters to turn them into blood [1st plague, Exodus 7,17], and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire.

All throughout this time of persecution God will ensure that there will be leaders in the church who are able, under the inspiration of the Spirit, to reveal his word. They will exercise the prophetic power of Elijah, being to the enemies of God like a devouring fire. They will also have the power that Moses and Aaron exercised against the pharaoh.

Apocalypse 11:7-8

When they will have finished their testimony, the **beast** that comes up from the bottomless pit [9:1] will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city [Babylon].

However, in this time before the end, as the local churches of Asia knew from their own experience, the churches and their leaders are vulnerable to persecution: the prophets are still being murdered. The power that attempts to destroy the church is likened to a **beast**. It is irrational and incomprehensible. The imagery is from Daniel and will be used in greater detail by John in the coming chapters. The power of the beasts is demonic: they come from the **bottomless pit** (see 9:1).

Apocalypse 11:8

Under the influence of the Spirit the great city is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.

The great city is Babylon. Here, under the enlightenment of the Spirit, it is referred to as **Sodom**, because of the corruption associated with it; as **Egypt**, because of the oppression and slavery for which it is responsible; and as **Jerusalem**, ‘where their Lord was crucified’, because the persecution carried out against the Christian community repeats what was done to Jesus himself in Jerusalem.

Babylon is a symbol for Rome and for any city that does not act in accordance with God’s will.

Apocalypse 11:9-12 Sharing in Jesus' Resurrection

For three and a half days members of the peoples and tribes and languages and nations they gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let their corpses to be placed in a tomb; and the inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and celebrate and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to the inhabitants of the earth. But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and those who saw them were terrified.

Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, 'Come up here!' And they went up to heaven in a cloud while their enemies watched them.

Apocalypse 11:12

The martyrs went up to heaven in a cloud while their enemies watched them.

The first six trumpets (8:7 - 9:21) call for repentance. They appeal to fear, for they describe the terrible destruction that is being perpetrated by the Roman system which some Christians are being tempted to embrace.

This is the climax of the revelation contained in the small scroll (10:2, 9, 10). It appeals to hope by holding up before the community the goal of their Christian life. Even if it leads to martyrdom, they, like Jesus, will be taken up by God into glory, where they will stand victorious (compare 5:6) and bring about God's reign.

Apocalypse 11:13-14

Conclusion of the Second Woe (the sixth trumpet, 9:13-21)

And at that moment there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

The **second woe** [8:13] had passed.

The **third woe** is coming very soon. [16:1]

Note that nine-tenths listened and repented!

