

Revelation

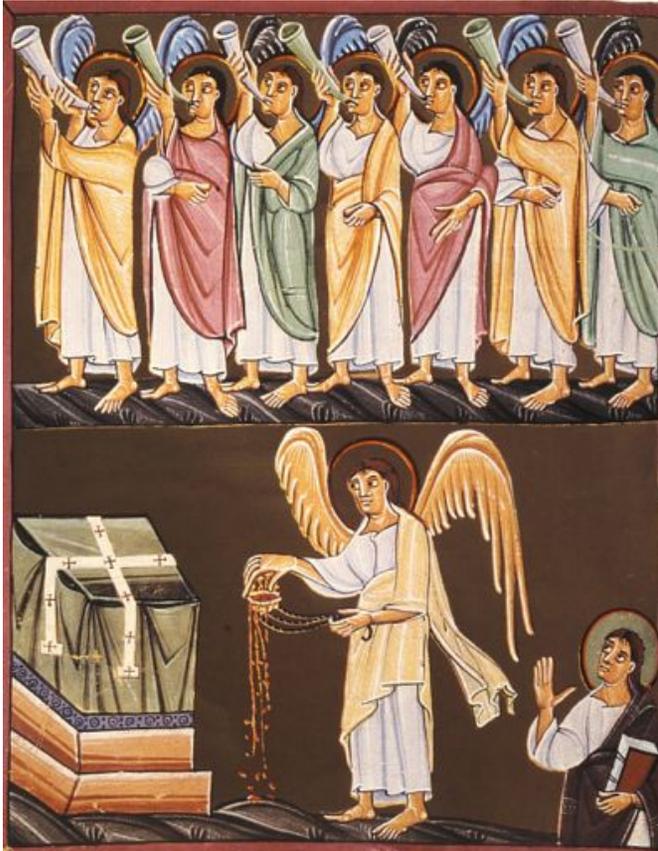
Lesson #9

The Seven Trumpets, Part 2

(10: 1 - - 11: 19)

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Review



“Seven Trumpets,” *Bamberger Apocalypse*
(illuminated manuscript, MS A. II, fol. 19v), c. 1000.
Bamberg State Library, Bamberg, Germany.

If we thought things were bad when the seven seals were opened and unleashed the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, blowing the seven trumpets escalated the drama exponentially, raising it to a cosmic plane, with the very heavens raining down fire upon the earth!

At the end of Lesson #8 only six trumpets had sounded.

There is still one more to go, and in Lesson #9 we will hear it!

Preview

With the opening of the seven seals and the sounding of the first six trumpets, John is stunned by his vision of the catastrophic disasters that befall humanity and the earth itself; it sickens him. But the visions continue. Two witnesses appear in (what is left of) Jerusalem, prophesying for 1,260 days, hated by all who hear them. A great beast rises from the abyss, wages war against them and kills them, their torn corpses lying in the street for three and a half days, while the whole world rejoices.

And then, to the horror of all, they begin to draw breath, they stand on their feet and they ascend into heaven. With that, a great earthquake strikes Jerusalem and a tenth of the city collapses, killing thousands.

And then the seventh trumpet sounds.



As we noted in Lesson #8, just as an interlude of two visions followed the opening of the sixth seal, so here an interlude of two visions follows the blowing of the sixth trumpet.

The Preamble

The Seven Seals

1. White horse
2. Red horse
3. Black horse
4. Pale horse
5. Souls of the slain
6. Earthquake
144,000 sealed
White-robed multitude in heaven
7. Silence

The Seven Trumpets

1. Hail and fire, mixed with blood
2. Huge mountain ablaze
3. Blazing star
4. Sun, moon and stars turned dark
5. Star, fallen to earth
6. Four angels, released
The "little" scroll
The two witnesses
7. Temple in heaven, opened



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In the first vision a mighty angel descends from heaven and in a voice like a roaring lion thunders: *“There shall be no more delay”* (10: 6)!

He then presents John with a “little scroll” and commands him to eat it!

“Then I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven wrapped in a cloud, with a halo around his head; his face was like the sun and his feet were like pillars of fire. In his hand he held a small scroll that had been opened. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and then he cried out in a loud voice as a lion roars. When he cried out, the seven thunders raised their voices, too. When the seven thunders had spoken, I was about to write it down; but I heard a voice from heaven say, ‘Seal up what the seven thunders have spoken, but do not write it down.’”

(10: 1-4)

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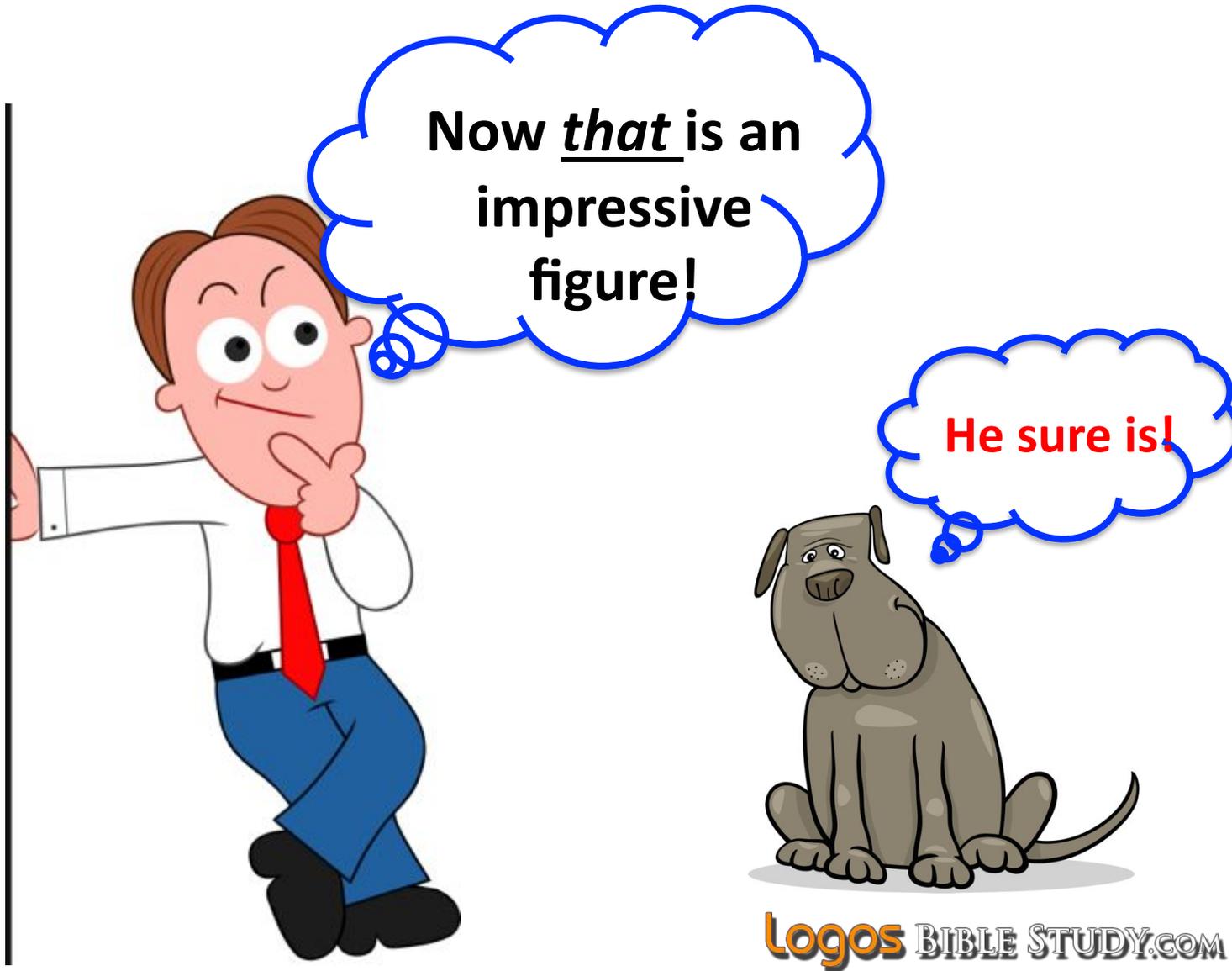
William Blake. *The Angel of Revelation* [10: 1] (watercolor, pen and black ink, over graphite), c. 1803-1805. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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This is the very same angel who speaks to John on behalf of the risen and glorified Christ in 1: 1; who introduced the scroll with seven seals in 5: 2; and who will close Revelation when he takes John on a guided tour of the New Jerusalem in 22: 1.

- This mighty angel is “wrapped in a cloud” [νεφέλη, ne-fee’-lay, as in the “pillar of cloud and fire” in Exodus];
- he has a “halo” [ἵρις, ee’ris, more commonly translated, a “rainbow”] around his head;
- his “face was like the sun and his feet were like pillars of fire,” and he stands with one foot on land and the other on the sea (10: 1-2), indicating his “might” [ἰξυρός, ee-skhu-ros’].





Notice that the scroll he held “had been opened” [ἠνεωγμένον, a perfect, passive verb], referring to the scroll with seven seals, opened by the Lamb in chapter 6: 1 – 8: 1.

- Some commentators claim that because it is called a “small scroll” it must be a second scroll, not the one opened by the Lamb. The word “small scroll” is indeed the diminutive form, [βιβλαρίδιον not βιβλίον], but it seems to be used interchangeably, for example, in 10: 8, where John uses βιβλίον for the “small scroll.”¹

¹ Richard Bauckham, in *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), p. 244, points out that other Greek works of Christian prophecy, such as the *Shepherd of Hermas*, also uses the words interchangeably. I thank Peter S. Williamson in his *Revelation*, (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture) Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015, for this observation and reference.



When the angel cries out like a lion, the “seven thunders” cry out, too. It is a deft allusion to the voice of God in Psalm 29, agreeing with what the angel has to say.

*“The voice of the Lord is **over the waters:** **1**
the glory of the Lord **thunders,**
the lord over the mighty waters . . .*

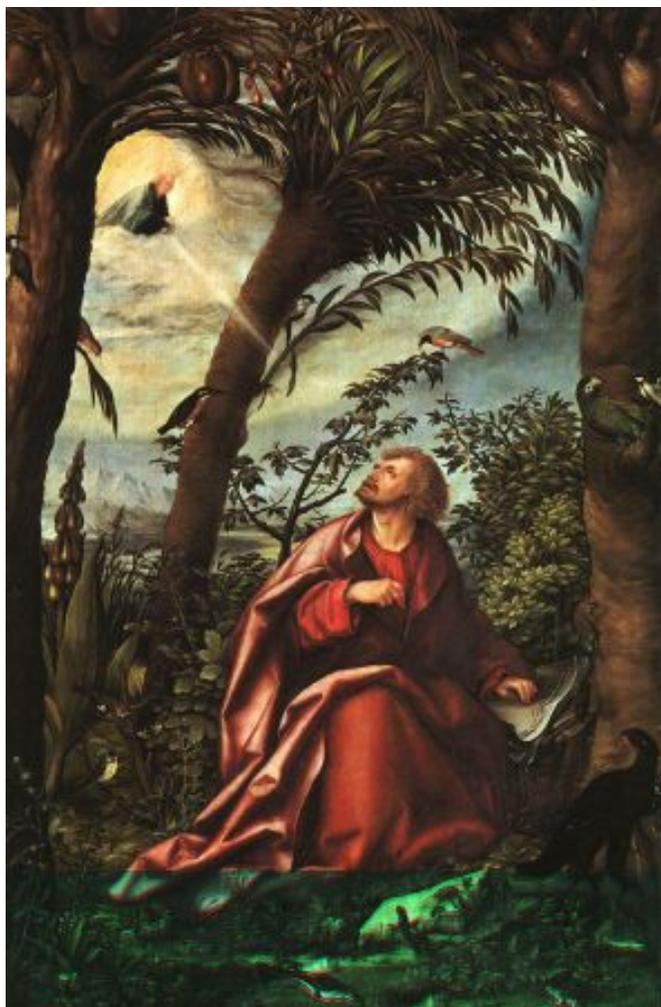
*The voice of the Lord is **splendor.** **2***

*The voice of the Lord **cracks the cedars . . .** **3***

*The voice of the Lord **strikes with fiery flame,** **4**
the voice of the Lord **shakes the desert . . .** **5***

*The voice of the Lord **makes the deer dance** **6**
and **strips the forests bare.** **7***

(Psalm 29: 3-9)



Hans Burgkmair. *St. John Altarpiece*, center panel
(oil on oak), 1518.
Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

John, pen in hand, gets ready to write down what the angel says, as he has written the seven letters to the seven churches and the series of visions he has experienced.

But the angel says, No! *“Seal up what the seven thunders have spoken, but do not write it down”* (10: 4), suggesting that there are elements of God’s “revelation” that are private, that are not to be shared with humanity.



Then the mighty angel raises his right hand to heaven and swears by him *“who created heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them, ‘There shall be no more delay[!].”*

This is precisely what the angel in Daniel does when Daniel asks the angel how long it will be before the visions revealed to him will occur. In Daniel, the angel *“swears by him who lives forever that it should be for a time, two times and half a time [3 ½ years] . . .”* (Daniel 12: 7).

John’s “revelation” draws intimately on its antecedents in Daniel, tightening the fabric of John’s vision. Here, the angel tells John that when *“the seventh angel blows his trumpet, the mysterious plan of God shall be fulfilled, as promised to his servants the prophets”* (10: 7).

“Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, ‘Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.’ So I went up to the angel and told him to give me the small scroll. He said to me, ‘Take and swallow it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will taste as sweet as honey.’ I took the small scroll from the angel’s hand and swallowed it. In my mouth it was like sweet honey, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then someone said to me, ‘You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues and kings.’”

(10: 8-11)

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The mighty angel holds an open scroll in his hand, and he commands John to take it. When John approaches, the angel then tells him to take the scroll and eat it!

Of course, this is a symbolic gesture.

The prophet Jeremiah complains to God that from his youth he loved God's word, and that now he has no choice but to hear it and obey it:

“When I found your words, I devoured them; your words were my joy, and the happiness of my heart.”

(Jeremiah 15: 16)

When Jeremiah first encountered God's words they meant everything to him; he devoured them—that is, he took them deeply into his heart and internalized them, making them a part of himself.



Likewise with Ezekiel. Shortly after God calls Ezekiel to be a prophet, Ezekiel looks, and . . .

“[I]t was then I saw a hand stretched out to me; in it was a written scroll. [God] unrolled it before me; it was covered with writing front and back. Written on it was: Lamentation, wailing, woe!

He said to me: ‘Son of man, eat what you find here; eat this scroll, then go, speak to the house of Israel.’ So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. ‘Son of man’, he said to me, ‘feed your stomach and fill your belly with this scroll I am giving you’. I ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth.”

(2: 9 – 3: 3)

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“Ezekiel Eats the Scroll.” *Lambeth Bible* (illuminated manuscript, Ms. 3, fol. 258v), c. 1146. Lambeth Palace Library, London.

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John eats the scroll.

“St. John Eats the Scroll,” *Apocalypse with Commentary in French Prose* (fragment) (illuminated manuscript, Add MS 38842, fol. 1v), early 14th century. British Library, London.

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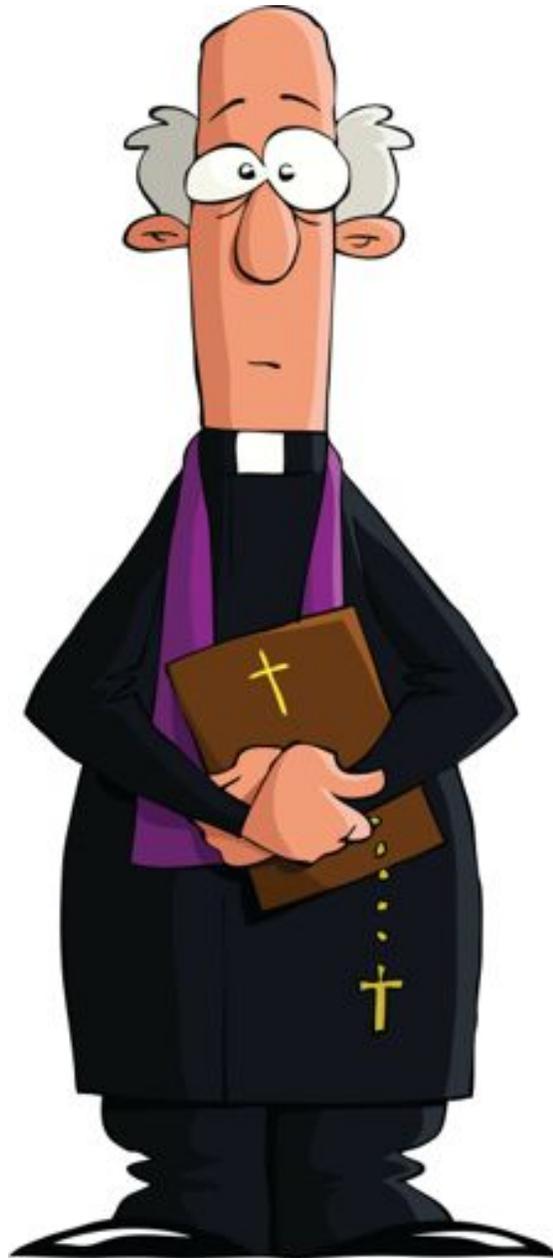
Ezekiel is a hard man. God had said to him:

“Look! I make your face as hard as theirs, and your brow as stubborn as theirs [the Israelites]. Like diamond, harder than flint, I make your brow. Do not be afraid of them . . .”

(3: 8-9)

And God did make him hard.

But John is a tender-hearted man, and what is on the scroll at first tastes like honey (for it’s the word of God, after all), but then it turns his stomach sour [πικραίνω, pee-kri’-no, “bitter”]; it makes him sick, much like Daniel.



The word of God is sweet, indeed, but it's not saccharine, and it is brutally honest. After studying God's word and internalizing it, we are called to put it into action. As St. James said (in the old 1611 King James translation):

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

(James 1: 22)

With knowledge and understanding of Scripture comes responsibility. Looking honestly and deeply into our own souls can be disconcerting at best, a terror at worst. For there are times when we gaze into our souls . . . and we see a picture of Dorian Gray staring back at us.

It makes us sick.

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***Dorain Gray.* Oliver Parker, director. Momentum Pictures, 2009.**

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“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 count those who are worshipping in it. But exclude the outer court of the temple; do not measure it, for it has been handed over to the Gentiles, who will trample the holy city for forty-two months. I will commission my two witnesses to prophesy for those twelve hundred and sixty days, wearing sackcloth.’”

(11: 1-3)

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John is told to measure the temple, but to exclude the outer court for it “has been handed over to the Gentiles” who will trample the “holy city” for forty-two months.

On the face of it, this is a puzzling scene, for the temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed in A.D. 70: it no longer exists in the “holy city” of Jerusalem at the time John is writing Revelation!

So, either this refers to a future *third* temple to be built in Jerusalem (the 1st Temple was built by Solomon, 959-586 B.C.; the 2nd Temple was built after the return from Babylon, 516 B.C. – A.D. 70), or it symbolically represents the Church, with Jerusalem representing the people of God and the outer courtyard representing the world controlled by those who oppose God.



The latter seems more probable, especially when taking into account the Johannine world view, although the symbolism gets a little dense.

That makes sense to me, but why the 42 months!

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The forty-two months recurs variously throughout Revelation as the period of “great tribulation”: forty-two months (11: 2; 13: 5); 1,260 days (42 months x 30 days = 1,260 (11: 3; 12: 6)); and a year, two years and a half-year (12: 14).

The time period recalls Daniel’s period of “great tribulation”:

“The man clothed in lined, who was upstream, lifted his hands to heaven; and I heard him swear by him who lives forever that it should be for a time, two times, and half a time; and that, when the power of the destroyer of the holy people was brought to an end, all these things should end.”

(12: 7)



Significantly, three and a half years is half of seven, the number of completion; thus, the Church will undergo persecution for a temporary period of time (Revelation 6: 1 -19: 10), ending with the return of Christ; the defeat of Satan and his crew; the Millennial kingdom; the last judgment; and the birth of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 19: 11 -22: 21).



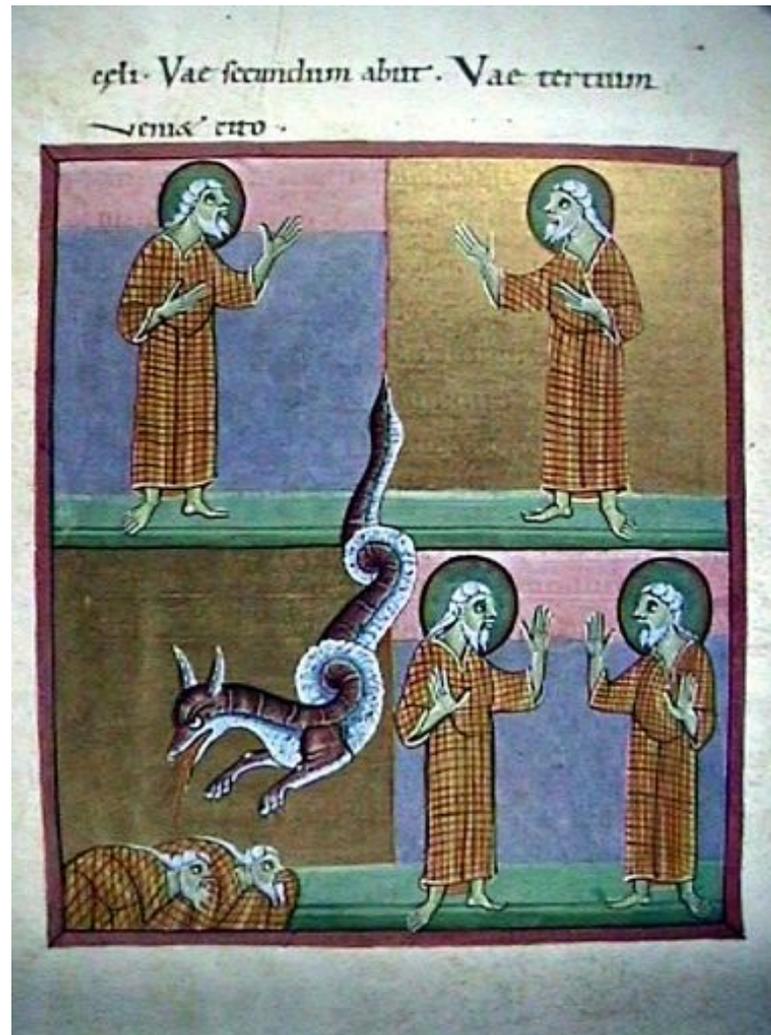
Just as the 2-part interlude interrupts the opening of the seventh seal (sealing the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel and the vast multitude from the “nations” before the throne of God), so a 2-part interlude interrupts the blowing of the seventh trumpet.

In Part 1, John eats the “little scroll”; now, in Part 2, John encounters two very strange “witnesses” who are prophesying in Jerusalem.

“These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. If anyone wants to harm them, fire comes out of their mouths and devours their enemies. In this way, anyone wanting to harm them is sure to be slain. They have the power to close up the sky so that no rain can fall during the time of their prophesying. They also have power to turn water into blood and to afflict the earth with any plague as often as they wish.”

(11: 4-6)

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“The Two Witnesses,” *Bamberger Apocalypse* (illuminated manuscript, MS A. II, fol. 27v), c. 1000. Bamberg State Library, Bamberg, Germany .

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Who are these
guys?



The two olive trees and the two lamp stands recall a similar scene in Zechariah:

“Then the angel who spoke with me returned and aroused me, like one awakened from sleep. He said to me, ‘What do you see?’ I replied, ‘I see a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on top of it. There are seven lamps that are on top of it, with seven spouts on each of the lamps that are on top of it. And beside it are two olive trees, one on the right of the bowl and one to its left.’”

(4: 1-5)

The angel then explains to Zechariah that the lamp stand is the Temple being constructed under the supervision of Zerubbabel, governor (and heir to David’s throne) of those who returned from Babylon (520-516 B.C.), and the two olive trees are Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest.



The lamp stand in Revelation is a fitting symbol of the Church, for as the lamp stand brings light into the world, so does the Church bring the light of Christ into the world.

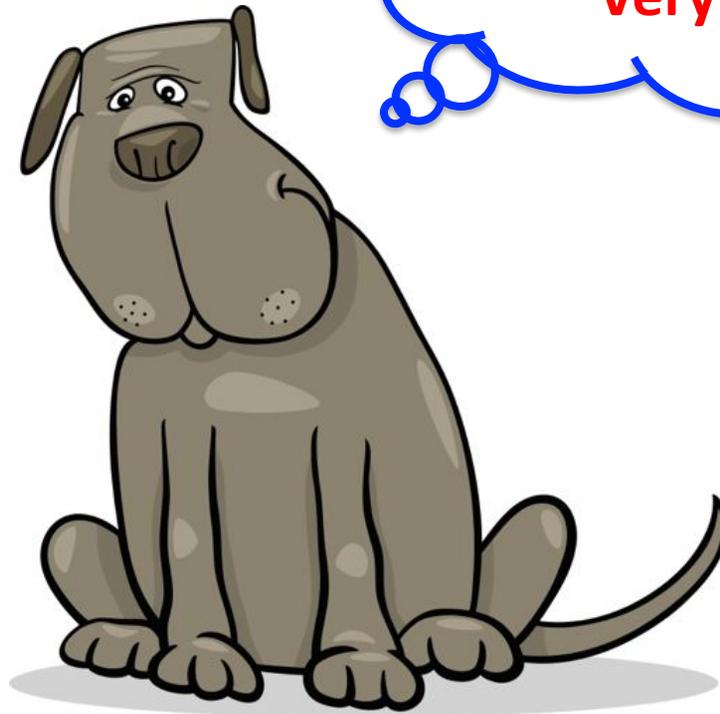
The two lamp stands may represent, as many of the early Church Fathers suggested, the Old and New Testaments, or perhaps they represent both Jews and Gentiles who comprise the Church in John's day.



Likewise, just as Zerubbabel and Joshua are God's witnesses in building the second Temple, so are there two witnesses in building God's Church, for throughout Scripture two witnesses are required for a valid testimony (Deuteronomy 17: 6), one reason why Jesus sends out his disciples two-by-two (Mark 6: 7; Luke 10: 1).



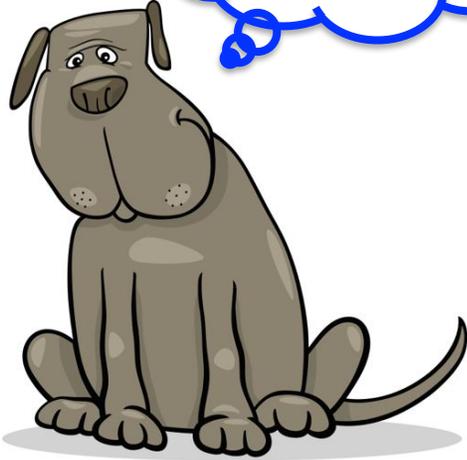
Moses and Elijah personify this dual prophetic testimony as prophets *par excellence*, Moses representing the Law and Elijah the Prophets. It is Moses who turns the water of the Nile River into blood in the first plague on Egypt and who brings the additional nine plagues (Exodus 7: 14 – 11: 10), and it is Elijah who shuts up the heavens so that it doesn't rain for three and a half years during his battle with King Ahab and his miserable wife, Jezebel (1 Kings 17: 1).



**So, the two witnesses
are Moses and Elijah.
Very clever!**



And don't forget that after Peter's confession of faith at Caesarea Philippi, the Transfiguration follows, where God the Father validates Peter's confession before two credible witnesses: Moses and Elijah.



Nice!

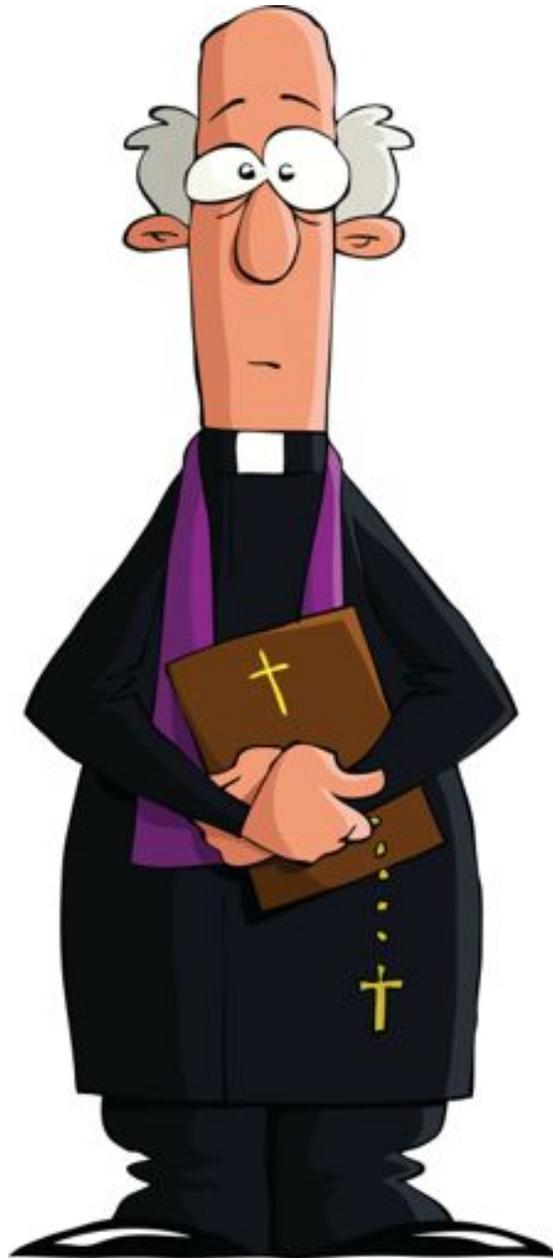
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“When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the abyss will wage war against them and conquer them and kill them. Their corpses will lie in the main street of the great city, which has the symbolic names ‘Sodom’ and ‘Egypt,’ where indeed their Lord was crucified. Those from every people, tribe, tongue, and nation will gaze on their corpses for three and a half days, and they will not allow their corpses to be buried. The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and be glad and exchange gifts because these two prophets tormented the inhabitants of the earth . . .

“But after the three and a half days, a breath of life from God entered them. When they stood on their feet, great fear fell on those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven say to them, ‘Come up here.’ So they went up to heaven in a cloud as their enemies looked on. At that moment there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell in ruins. Seven thousand people were killed during the earthquake; the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe has passed, but the third is coming soon.”

(11: 7-14)

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Satan rises from the abyss, slays the two witnesses, and all the people rejoice! As on New Year's Eve, parties erupt throughout the land as people celebrate the slaughter of the prophets who had been telling them what they didn't want to hear!

As Jesus had said: ***“They will hand you over to persecution, and they will kill you. You will be hated by all nations because of my name”*** (Matthew 24: 9).

But then, after three and one half days of rotting in the sun, the two witnesses draw breath, stand on their feet, and as the world watches, they ascend into heaven!



Yikes!



And at that very moment . . .

“[T]here was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell in ruins. Seven thousand people were killed during the earthquake; the rest were terrified”

(11: 13)



***“The second woe
has passed, but
the third is
coming soon.”***

(11: 14)



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“Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet. There were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world now belongs to our Lord and to his Anointed, and he will reign forever and ever.’ The twenty-four elders who sat on their thrones before God prostrated themselves and worshipped God and said:

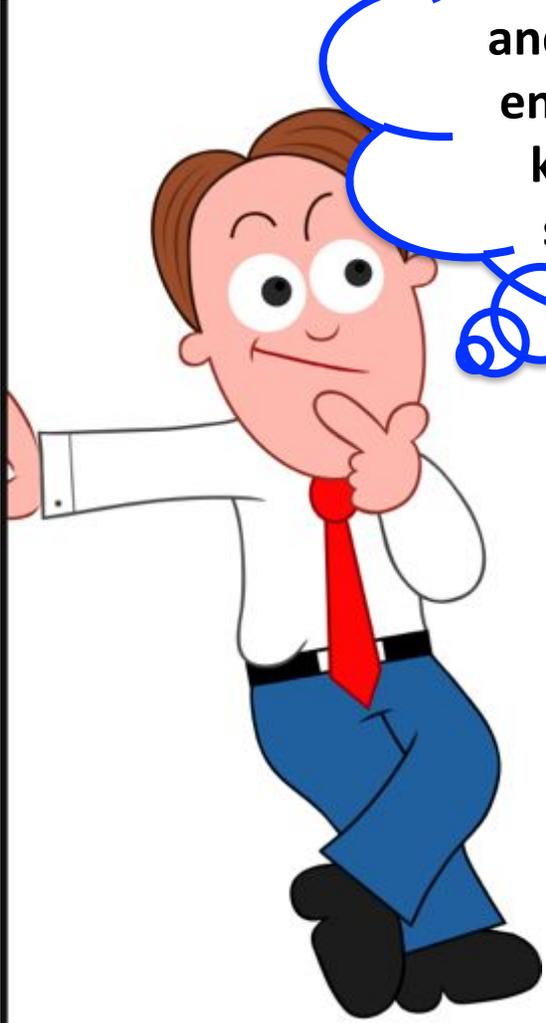
‘We give thanks to you, Lord God almighty
who are and who were,

for you have assumed your great power
and have established your reign.

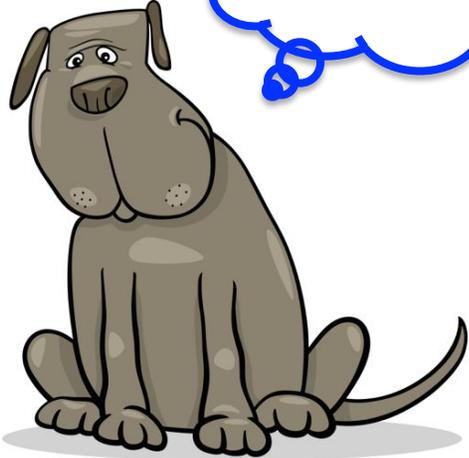
The nations raged, but your wrath has come,
and the time for the dead to be judged,
and to recompense our servants, the prophets,
and the holy ones and those who fear your name,
the small and great alike,
and to destroy those who destroy the earth.”

(11: 15-18)

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The twenty-four elders' song recalls Psalm 2 which begins, "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot what is vain?" and it ends with God's Anointed smashing the kings of the earth "with an iron rod," shattering them "like a potter's jar."



That's a very
deft allusion!

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“Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant could be seen in the temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder, and earthquake, and a violent hailstorm.”

(11: 19)



“Seventh Trumpet,” *Bamberger Apocalypse* (illuminated manuscript, MS A. II, fol. 42r), c. 1000. Bamberg State Library, Bamberg, Germany.

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Questions for discussion and thought

1. What is the difference between the scroll opened by the Lamb and the small scroll in Revelation 10: 2?
2. What does John do with the small scroll?
3. Who else in Scripture does something similar with a scroll?
4. Who are the two witnesses?
5. What happens when the angel blows the seventh trumpet?

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