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## How the First-Century, Asia Minor, Jewish Christians Understood the Book of Revelation

### 3. Outline

#### Scene 2, Part 2 – An Open Door into Heaven

#### Yeshua and the Kingdoms of the World (4-16:21)

Scene 1 – The Island called Patmos (1:9–3:20)  
Scene 2 – An Open Door into Heaven (4–16:21)  
Scene 3 – The Wilderness (17–21:8)  
Scene 4 – A high mountain (21:9-10–22:21)

The 4 scenes (or sections) of Revelation are separated by the author's words **I was in the Spirit**.

**Scene 2** transitions from the Island of Patmos to an open door into heaven:

"After these things, I looked and saw a door opened in heaven, and the first voice I heard was like the sound of a shofar speaking with me, saying, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.' Immediately, **I was in the Spirit** and look, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne." (4:1-2)

In Scene 2, Part 1, we talked about the door of invitation into worship in Yahweh's Heavenly Court. Then we walked through the symbolism of the 7 Seals. Now we move into the next 2 complete cycles of 7 and what it means to be a Faithful Witness.

Whereas the **7 Seals** *represent and expose* the various forms of evil that have *always been* in the world, the **7 Trumpets** and **7 Bowls** *represent and expose* the disastrous judgments that are *always coming* as a result of that evil and on behalf of Yahweh's people, the Faithful Witnesses. Evil always turns destructively on itself, and it is present and ongoing. (The advanced technology of our times gives new ways for evil to be propagated as well as more awareness of its presence globally, but the depth and nature of evil has not changed. In Scene 3, we will see more pertaining to final judgments.)

### The 7 Trumpets, 7 Thunders, and 7 Bowls

- The 7 Trumpets expose *partial* destruction from the judgments ( $\frac{1}{3}$  is symbolic of a lot but not all). In them, John emphasizes the two greatest fears of the Roman empire (barbarian hordes and ecological crises) to illustrate the destructive result of their arrogance.
- The 7 Bowls expose *total* destruction from the judgments. In them, John emphasizes the total decimation caused by the demonic force at work in creation.

John reorders and reappropriates the plagues of Egypt symbolically for the first century. In both Exodus and Revelation, the plagues function *in the same way* and *for the same purpose*. Let's compare:

- **Each plague in Exodus** was a challenge to the claims of a particular Egyptian deity.
  - The contest was not between people groups but between Pharaoh (their god) and Yahweh (God).
  - The actual plagues resulted from the evil (the arrogance of Pharaoh) turning in on itself.
- **Each plague in Revelation** was a challenge to the claims of a particular Roman deity.
  - The contest was between the Roman empire and the claims of Yeshua.
  - The plagues (symbolic of present evil) resulted from the evil of the Empire turning in on itself.  
**They symbolize, not plagues coming in the future literally, but judgments on specific evils that are always coming and have always operated in the kingdom of darkness; John was not predicting judgment but exposing the judgments caused by evil turning in on itself.**<sup>1</sup>

**The 7 Trumpets** – (8:6-11:19) John uses the 7<sup>th</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> plagues of Egypt to symbolize partial destruction.

1. Hail, fire, blood; destruction of 1/3 earth, trees, grass.
2. Burning mountain; destruction of 1/3 sea, sea creatures, ships.
3. Burning bitter star (Wormwood); destruction of 1/3 rivers, springs.
4. 1/3 sun, moon, and stars smitten; the next 3 shofars are woes, as declared by the eagle in mid-heaven.
5. Woe 1. The bottomless pit is opened, smoke with locusts that torment those with the beast's mark.
6. Woe 2. Four angels released to kill 1/3 of demonic, unrepentant mankind.  
Beautiful angel with lion's voice, little book, and 7 thunders. The mystery is finished; no more delay.
7. Woe 3. The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of Messiah!

**The 7 Thunders** – (10:3-4) Each thunder spoke with a voice, but John was prohibited from writing their words. "Seal up the things which the 7 peals of thunder have spoken and do not write them."

**The 7 Bowls** – (15:1-16:21) John uses the 6<sup>th</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> plagues of Egypt to symbolize the complete destruction of the demonic forces in creation. Angels pour out the bowls on:

1. The earth – Horrible festering sores broke out on people marked by the beast.
2. The sea – It turned to blood, and everything in the sea died.
3. Rivers and springs – They also became blood.
4. The sun – It scorched men who cursed God.
5. The beast's throne – Its kingdom was plunged into darkness; people gnawed their tongues in agony.
6. The River Euphrates – It dried up to give way for the kings from the East. Impure spirits were released.
7. The air – A loud voice from the throne in the Temple said, "It is done." Huge hailstones fell.

The wrath of the Lamb (His conquering, sacrificial suffering and death) stands in stark contrast to the pride, pretense, and stubborn self-absorption of broken humanity that implodes on itself in judgment reflected in the plagues. His Kingdom comes to restore, redeem, and renew what has been broken! The joy of this renewal is reflected in the intervals of praise in Verses 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; and 16:18-21.

Revelation teaches that people do not repent with the use of torment, judgment, or punishment. They repent through the Faithful Witness of Yahweh's people in the world! Although the Faithful Witnesses suffer as a result of living in truth, they are protected, numbered, sealed, imbued with His Spirit, and never forgotten or abandoned. Father, help us as Faithful Witnesses to lead others to repentance and restoration in Your Kingdom!

### Three Roles of Faithful Witness

How shall we then live as those who mirror the Lamb? And how do we prepare for the future? I have given further thoughts about this in the endnotes.<sup>2</sup> Understanding our roles gives us comfort and challenge as we follow Him during these difficult times. A Faithful Witness is you and me, born again by His Spirit, washed in His blood, and eager to follow the Lamb wherever He goes. It is our part in the grand scene of Yahweh's universe! We are His ambassadors, witnesses, and worshippers who:

#### 1. Lead people to repentance (Chapter 10)

Our role mirrors John's. He was a Faithful Witness, commissioned as a prophet. He used Ezekiel 2:8-3:3 to describe his calling. (The angel sent by Yahweh standing on land and sea contests and contrasts a colossal statue of the sun god Helios that stood in the ancient Greek city of Rhodes in the harbor near Patmos, one of Seven Wonders of the World. – Revelation 10:8)

John is asked to eat the scroll (the revelation). For Ezekiel, God's word is sweet, but the outcome is bitter. For John, God's word of prophecy is difficult, but the outcome is the fruit of repentance. The Faithful Witness fulfills God's purpose of leading people to repentance with their self-sacrifice and love, even when they do not see it working. Our calling is sweet and bitter.

## 2. Suffer for a limited time (11:7-11)

John's visions echo Daniel 7, 8, and 9. See also 1 Peter 1:3-9; 2:20b-23; 4:12-19.

Daniel (605-530 BC) prophesied about Antiochus the 4<sup>th</sup> of Epiphanes (167-164 BC) who attacked the identity of the Jewish people for 3½ years until the Maccabean revolt; this amount of time became a symbol of the *limited time of the suffering of God's people*. Our suffering has a limit. These references mention the same amount of *limited* time; the numbers are symbolic, not literal.

- Daniel 7:25 – a time, two times, and half a time = 3½
- Daniel 8:14 – 2,300 evenings and mornings (evening and morning sacrifices) = 1,150 days = 3½ years.
- 1,260 days, 42 months, 3½ years – all the same amount of time.

## 3. Live self-sacrificially (11:3-13)

The Two Witnesses (Faithful Witnesses) mirror other accounts in Scripture of the security of two disciples in ministry together. They represent God's people (two olive trees and two lampstands; see Zechariah 4:3,13,14) and the nature of their faithful mission. The Temple is under attack, and the inner Court is preserved (11:1-2). Their mission includes suffering, vindication, and resurrection.

The Two Witnesses have the power to shut the sky (Elijah) and plague the earth (Moses); The Faithful Witnesses live into the mantle of these great men. The mystery of God revealed (i.e., the apocalypse) is that He accomplishes His purposes through the self-sacrificial living of the Faithful Witnesses.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The specific symbolism of each plague in the Trumpets and Bowls is beyond the current scope of this study.

<sup>2</sup> How do we reconcile Scriptures that seem to support the storing up of goods and preparations for days of calamity and Scriptures that seem to discourage it? On one hand, Jacob's son, Joseph, stored grain in preparation for a famine. But our Rabbi Yeshua said these things:

- "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)
- "Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? (See the entire Matthew 6:25-34.)
- And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began thinking to himself, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' And he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and I will store all my grain and my goods there. And I will say to myself, "You have many goods stored up for many years to come; relax, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself!"' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is demanded of you; and as for all that you have prepared, who will own it now?' Such is the one who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich in relation to God." (Luke 12:16-21)

**Let's take a closer look to find the answer.** Yeshua's teaching is *always* about the heart. Only *you* can allow God to examine the attitudes and motives of your heart. I believe it is possible to store sustenance at the direction of the Spirit, as Joseph did, without anxiety or fear. But if you are not able, it's o.k. Either way, the Father will take care of you. It is about being led by Him.

Conversely, the motives of the rich landowner in the parable were obviously selfish, greedy, and lazy; he had no desire to be alert or to share his goods. His world was centered on his own need.

The words of Yeshua seem to reflect a simplicity of lifestyle with regards to possessions. In all things, let's be sure to seek His kingdom first (Matthew 6:33), to not be weighed down by distractions, and to ask Him to search and purify our hearts.