

Intro

Good morning, my name is John. John of Patmos. In recent weeks I have been telling you about my visions, given by Jesus. I am excited to share more today.

Last time I told you about the church, which can be seen as both 144,000 and innumerable [chapter 7]. After that [chs 8-9] I saw just more judgments that will come over the earth. They are symbolised by trumpets, which are warning signals for the unbelievers. These judgements are terrifying! But the sinful humans on earth will not repent. Six trumpets I have seen so far. The seventh trumpet is yet to come [11:15-19]. That will probably show me the return of Jesus, the last day.

Let me now first tell you what I saw, and then try to understand it.

Retelling

At the beginning of the vision I got a kind of yardstick, a measure. Someone told me to measure the temple of God and the altar and the worshippers in it. That measuring means building in progress, or protection; I am not sure.

I heard that the outer parts of the temple had been given to the Gentiles and that they would persecute the holy city for 42 months.

And then I saw two witnesses of God, who will prophesy during the same time, 42 months, 3.5 years. I also saw them as two olive trees and as two lampstands. Jesus was playing with elements of Zechariah in my vision.

At first God will protect these prophets, who are his witnesses. If anyone wants to harm them, they can effectively defend themselves. God will give them power to shut up the sky so that no rain falls; and power to turn water into blood and to strike the earth with plagues. Of whom does this remind you?? These two witnesses are acting much like Elijah and Moses.

But then things go wrong for them. A beast from the earth will attack them ... and it will be stronger ... and it will kill them!! Hu.

At first they cannot even be buried. That is a great shame in my culture, in many ways. But that will last only 3.5 days = a short time. The gentiles will poke fun on them. They will be glad that their prophetic witness had ended. But God will intervene! After 3.5 days, he will resurrect them and they will ascend to heaven while their enemies are watching.

And then God will punish that city and 7,000 people will be killed in an earthquake. That big city is of course Babylon = Rome = the powers which resist God.

This intervention by God will make a really big impression on these unbelievers, and they will glorify the God of heaven for they recognise his power. That's a fascinating aspect: the unbelievers will not repent as a result of harsh judgements, the trumpets, but as a result of the witness of the prophets.

Interpreting

What can this vision mean? It is a parable in two parts, verses 1-2 and 3-13. I will focus on the latter. I think it's all about the church, so that is about you! You are the new temple of God, for the temple symbolises the church. You are work in progress, and partly exposed to suffering. You are kept safe in your innermost self, yet exposed to the hostility of the world. The vision as a whole reminds me of the fifth seal that I discussed with you [6:9-11]: some believers will be killed in the course of history.

As to these two witnesses, I am reminded of Zechariah 4 and Daniel 7. You are too, of course! Zechariah also saw two olive trees and two lampstands. And lampstands also occurred in an earlier

vision I had. Remember?? They represent churches [1:20]. Olive trees likewise represent believers. But in my earlier vision we had seven lampstands and now two; so how do I explain that? The number seven symbolises the completeness of the churches. Why the number two here? In Old and New Testament courts of law, you needed two witnesses to secure a valid testimony. That's why God's representatives are seen as two. They are his witnesses in the world. But I definitely think these witnesses are not individuals; they symbolise the entire church.

These two olive trees, that is also you, the people of God. Like your Lord, you are first anointed with power, then persecuted, and finally vindicated and raised to heaven. And then, at the end, people in great numbers will turn to God in awe and give him the glory due to him, and the way will be free for the last trumpet to sound. To sound with the news, not that God destroyed the world, but that the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.

So I think that God will win the world to himself, not by the exercise of power, not by violence, but by the blood of the Lamb and the witness of his Church. Wow!

The two witnesses represent you, the witnessing and suffering Church. You, the church, are receiving power to prophesy, that is, to proclaim the gospel during the period between the two comings of Christ. The word you speak is compared to fire!

Wow! But the church will be persecuted and killed. It will be costly to be faithful to God. Yet the church will be resurrected, which means that you participate in Jesus's triumph over death; your testimony will be brought to life. Wow, will its enemies get a fright!

These 42 months (= 1,260 days, verse 3) refers to the period of proclamation by God's people prophesied by Daniel. Do you know what he calls it? Daniel calls this 'a time, and times, and half a time' [7:25; 12:7, 11-12]. After that defeat will last only 3.5 days, so that is very short.

These 3.5s, that's broken sevens – the imperfection of the present time.

Applying

You want to know what this means for you? The warning trumpets, these judgements, don't achieve much. The unbelievers don't repent. But the two witnesses, the church's prophetic witness, the positive proclamation of the gospel, that's what brings people to faith! So please start proclaiming Jesus now!

It's so powerful that it is compared to fire; so beware: the fire does not mean that the church can use violence!

You, as the church, are now in the role of Moses and Elijah. You have a prophetic role! You are the salt of the earth. Go and testify to Jesus. Judgements don't lead to conversions – but your ministry does. Tell them about the hope that is in you.

Be like the lamb, offer your life in the service of the good news. That is your way to be victorious! Speak the word to pharaoh, speak the word to Jezebel.
