

A thick black L-shaped border is positioned on the left and bottom edges of the page. The vertical line on the left extends from the top to the bottom, while the horizontal line at the bottom extends from the left edge to the right edge. The top and right corners of the page are open.

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## Chapter 11

# Opening Prayer

Let us pray.

Direct, O Lord, we beseech you,  
all our actions by your holy inspirations,  
and carry them on by your gracious assistance,  
that every prayer and work of ours  
may begin always from you,  
and by you be happily ended.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

# Source Material

- *Revelation*, Peter S. Williamson
- *Revelation, Sacra Pagina*, Wilfrid J. Harrington, OP
- *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Joseph Ratzinger
- *The Antichrist*, Vincent P. Miceli, SJ
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- *New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE)*
- *Douay-Rheims Bible*

# Summary of chapter 9-10

- We left off in chapters 9-10 with the sounding of the fifth and sixth trumpets, which unleashed a plague of locusts and an army of cavalry led by fallen angels
  - *These symbolized a great spiritual attack, allowed by God, and aimed primarily at the “inhabitants of the earth,” those not among God’s people, in order that they might repent*
- We saw the scroll, now completely unsealed, representing God’s salvific plan for his people given to John, who was commanded to eat it.
  - *To eat the scroll was a sign of his incorporating its message and being commissioned to proclaim it*
  - *The message was sweet to his taste because it was the word of God.*
  - *It also soured his stomach because it foretold the immense suffering and trials of the Church before the end.*

# Preview of chapter 11

- Chapter 11 will focus on a pair of visions by John: the account of the “two witnesses” and the sounding of the seventh and final trumpet
- The message is twofold: what is the role of the Church in God’s plan, and what will happen to the Church at the end.
- Our time period in the first vision is just before the end, and it describes again the final battle before God’s definitive victory, this time from the perspective of the Church on earth
- The second vision described the end, the day of Judgment
- Chapter 11 is one of the more difficult chapters to interpret, and there is not universal agreement among scholars as to the interpretation of certain elements, though the overarching message is clear

# Excursus: The Temple of God

- The Temple is a major focal point – both historical and symbolic – throughout the OT and NT
- In any religion, a temple serves as a place of worship and/or the dwelling place of a deity
  - *For Christians and Jews, God’s true temple is in heaven, and the various temples on earth are a locus of his presence among them and a physical place to approach him in worship and supplication*
- The first physical ‘temple’ was during the Israelites’ 40-year sojourn in the desert following the Exodus from Egypt.
  - *It was a portable tent or “tabernacle,” which they moved with them as they traveled. Thus, God remained with them on the way.*
  - *The people understood that God was physically and directly present in the innermost part of this temple, called the “Holy of Holies,” where the Ark of the Covenant was kept.*

# Excursus: The Temple of God

- During the reign of King Solomon (about 950BC), a more permanent structure was built in Jerusalem on Mount Zion or the "Temple Mount"
  - *This temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587BC at the time of the Jewish exile*
  - *God promised a return from exile and a new temple in which he would dwell with his people*
- After the exile, the Jews returned and rebuilt the temple on the same spot. It was greatly renovated by King Herod the Great around the time of the birth of Christ
  - *This temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70AD, never to be rebuilt*
  - *All that remains is an outer wall, called the western or "wailing" wall, which is considered a sacred site to the Jews to this day*

# Excursus: The Temple of God

- But the real fulfillment of God's promise came with the birth of Christ, the "Word made flesh," who, "made his dwelling among us." (Jn 1:14, literally "pitched his tent")
  - *It was in the person of Christ, who is Emmanuel, "God with us," where the true Temple was*
  - *That "temple" was destroyed at the crucifixion, but was "rebuilt" three days later at the resurrection*
- With the resurrection and the commissioning of the Apostles, the Church became the new temple, the dwelling place of God (Eph 2:19; 1 Pt 2:5), as was each local church (1 Cor 3:16), as was each individual believer made a dwelling place of God through baptism (1 Cor 6:19)

# Excursus: The Temple of God

- Looking ahead to the end of Revelation, we will see a heavenly Jerusalem, the dwelling place of God, descend upon the earth.
- The faithful will dwell there with God forever in peace and unending happiness
- As we will learn, there will be no temple in this new Jerusalem, as God will be immediately and intimately present to each person

# Excursus: The Gentiles and “Spiritual Israel”

- Typically in the NT, the term Gentiles is used to describe non-Jews, the pagan peoples who do not know God
  - *They are sometimes communally referred to as “Greeks,” meaning the Greek-speaking peoples of the Roman Empire*
  - *There was a clear cultural and ethnic distinction between Jews and Gentiles*
- We often see in the Gospels that Jesus first begins his mission to the Jews only, for example sending out his disciples to Jewish territory only
  - *“Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Mt 10:6)*
  - *“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Mt 10:24)*
- Later, he sends the disciples out into the “whole world,” commanding them to bring the Gospel “to all nations.” (Mt 28:18)
  - *The bulk of Paul’s missionary efforts were in Gentile areas: Greece, Turkey, Syria, Rome, etc. (Gal 2:8-9)*

# Excursus: The Gentiles and “Spiritual Israel”

- Peter and Paul marvel at the generosity of God and the universality of his offer of salvation, not only to Jews but to the Gentiles as well (Acts 10:34; Gal 3:28)
- In Revelation, these terms will take on a slightly different meaning
  - *The people of God (the baptized) are Israel (eschatological or “spiritual” Israel), made God’s people not by blood but by faith (Mk 3:34)*
  - *All the “inhabitants of the earth” are the Gentiles, those who do not know God or belong to his people. Typically, they are the antagonists, battling against God and the Church*

## Excursus: 3½ years, 42 months, 1260 days

- We will see these three figures many times in the coming chapters. Notice that they all refer to the same amount of time.
- As we have seen, numbers in Revelation are often symbolic of something, not necessarily defining a quantity and not to be understood literally
- We have seen that the number seven refers to totality or completeness.
  - *It follows that 3½ (half of seven) will mean incompleteness or a temporary time or a "short" span.*
- The number 3½ was seen several times in the Book of Daniel to refer to a (temporary) period of persecution of God's people.
  - *It will take on a similar meaning in Revelation to describe a "short" period in which evil will appear to have the upper hand and in which the Church must persevere in faith*
  - *Note that when compared to the glory and bliss of eternity, the sufferings of earth will indeed seem like a "short" time. (Rom 8:18; 1 Pt 5:10)*

# The measuring rod (11:1-2)

- Reminiscent of a similar scene in Ezekiel 40-43, in which an angel uses a rod to measure the dimensions of the new temple in Jerusalem
- What temple is John measuring in Revelation 11?
  - *Likely not the temple in Jerusalem, since it had been destroyed 25 years earlier in 70AD*
  - *Likely not the temple of heaven – there wouldn't be 'gentiles' there trampling the outer court*
  - *Likely not some future temple in Jerusalem, to be built on the same spot. Some scholars make this argument. But as we've said, with the coming of Christ, he himself is the temple, the place of right worship of God. To refer back to a physical dwelling doesn't seem right.*

# The measuring rod (11:1-2)

- What temple is John measuring in Revelation 11?
  - *The best interpretation is that the temple referred to here is the Church itself.*
  - *Through holy baptism and incorporation into the Body of Christ, which is the Church, the souls of the faithful become the dwelling place of God*
  - *In this sense, it could be that John is not physically measuring length and width, but rather counting the number of the faithful*
- Why measure it?
  - *Perhaps the temple (meaning the Church) is “under construction,” growing larger, continually adding new members through preaching and baptism, and continually strengthening existing members in the faith until the end of time.*
  - *This symbolic action of measuring also tells us of God’s care and oversight of his Church*
  - *Perhaps God is telling us he is waiting patiently for the full number of faithful to enter the Church before the end.*

# The measuring rod (11:1-2)

- “Will trample for 42 months”
  - *At some point before the end, the “Gentiles” will unleash a great persecution against God’s people.*
  - *It will last a “short” period. God will limit its duration*
  - *Notice that the faithful are ‘safe’ inside the temple, meaning their share in the ultimate victory of God is assured; it cannot be taken away from them – as long as they remain inside!*
  - *Remember the seemingly ironic prediction of Jesus to the disciples: “...they will put some of you to death...but not a hair on your head will be destroyed” (Lk 21:16-17)*
  - *In other words, stay inside the temple (the Church) through faith, and you will ensure your salvation even if the “gentiles’ trample you!*

# The two witnesses (11:3-6)

- There is no universal agreement as to their identity
  - *They likely refer to the evangelical witness of the universal Church as a whole rather than two future individuals*
  - *Throughout Church history, preachers have been sent out two-by-two, as Jesus himself did in Mk 6:7. This image could be a symbol of that great evangelical activity*
  - *But this interpretation does not eliminate the possibility of a pair of particularly gifted witnesses who will testify at some point during the Church's final tribulation.*
  
- “Lampstand” and “Olive trees”
  - *A lampstand is a fitting image of the Church, which Jesus used himself (5:14), called to shine the light of Gospel to all nations*
  - *The Church in general and Christians in particular are anointed with the grace of the Holy Spirit for their task of testifying to Christ before the world. (Thus we are called Christians because we share in the anointing of Christ, the “anointed one.”)*

# The two witnesses (11:3-6)

- “Lampstand” and “Olive trees”
  - *The two witnesses, symbolizing the universal Church, are so powerfully anointed that they are likened to olive trees, the source of the anointing oil*
  - *That is, they are not merely anointed with the oil of an olive tree – they are the olive trees themselves. Such is the power of the Church’s witness before the world of unbelievers*
- Note the OT references in their unusual powers
  - *“Fire from their mouths” – reminiscent of Jer 5:14 – “I make my words a fire in your mouth, and this people the wood that it shall devour”*
  - *“Close up the sky” – recalls the time of drought and famine that accompanied the preaching of Elijah against King Ahab and the followers of Baal (1 Kgs 17-18)*
  - *“Turn water into blood” – like Moses in his dealings with Pharaoh (Ex 7)*

# The two witnesses (11:3-6)

- Note the OT references in their unusual powers
  - *The message conveyed with these striking images is not a literal description of their powers, but rather describes the power of their preaching and witness, which is like that of the great prophets Jeremiah, Elijah and Moses*
  - *But as we will see, the “inhabitants of the earth” will violently reject this preaching*

# The defeat and victory of the two witnesses (11:7-12)

- Let's analyze the elements of the vision first, then attempt an interpretation...
- “Finished their testimony”
  - *With the conclusion of their testimony, or perhaps as a final word of their testimony, God allows the two witnesses to be killed*
  - *This is of course reminiscent of the death of Christ himself and has been mirrored by countless martyrs through the centuries*
- First mention of the beast, who will be more fully introduced in chapter 13. More on him later...
- Sodom, Egypt and the earthly Jerusalem – all locations of sin and/or rejection of God. They are corporately labeled as the ‘great city,’ the dwelling place of the ‘inhabitants of the earth’
- The whole world (“those from every people, tribe, tongue and nation) – will gaze upon and gloat over the corpses of the two witnesses for a ‘short’ time (3½ days)
  - *The two witnesses are mocked even death by being denied a burial*

# The defeat and victory of the two witnesses (11:7-12)

- So 'glad' are the inhabitants of the earth that they make the apparent defeat of the two witnesses into a type of holiday in which they exchange gifts
  - *They felt 'tormented' by the two witnesses – the truth of the Word of God will always be a torment to sinners, who deep down know the truth but refuse to embrace it*
- “Breath of life” enters them
  - *After the 3½ days, God will resurrect the witnesses, breathing life into them again, in a scene similar to Ezk 37*
  - *These faithful witnesses will be assumed into heaven as their enemies look on, causing them great fear*
  - *Recall Jn 11:25 – “He who believes in me, even if he dies, will live.”*

# The defeat and victory of the two witnesses (11:7-12)

- Interpretation
- The two witnesses represent the whole Church
- The Church's witness before the end will be powerfully anointed by God, making very clear the distinction between the way of Christ and the way of the world
- It will incite great rage, rejection and antagonism by the "inhabitants of the earth," who feel "tormented" by this testimony of the Gospel
- The death of the two witnesses at the hands of the beast appear to prophesy an apparent defeat of the Church, in which godless powers and voices and practices drown out the proclamation of the Gospel
  - *This is another sign of some great tribulation to be endured by the faithful before the end.*

# The defeat and victory of the two witnesses (11:7-12)

- Interpretation
- This apparent defeat of the Church will cause great rejoicing amongst her enemies
- But at the end, the Church will be vindicated, raised to eternal life in heaven, causing horror and fear in those who persecuted her.
- The roles will be reversed at the end – the “inhabitants of the earth” who rejected God and persecuted the Church will suffer defeat, while the faithful of the Church will win the victory
- Note how the life of the Church (witnessing/testifying, killed, raised, ascended, vindicated) mirrors that of Jesus himself!

# The response of the 'great city' (11:13-14)

## ■ "Great earthquake"

- *As we have seen, such geological events represent the action or manifestation of God. In this case, it is the manifestation of his judgment*

## ■ A measured judgment

- *It is a great earthquake, but 'only' a tenth of the city is destroyed, and 'only' 7000 people are killed, a substantial number but still only a small part of the whole*
- *The judgment befalls the 'great city,' home to the 'inhabitants of the earth,' who as we recall, are the focus of the three woes (8:13)*
- *This is only the second woe!*

# The response of the 'great city' (11:13-14)

## ■ A surprising result

- *After the events of the death and reanimation of the two witnesses, as well as the deaths of the 7000, the other inhabitants of the earth "give glory to God."*
- *They repent! This is the first time we have seen repentance. Here we see the patience of God (and the endurance of the Church) bearing fruit.*

## ■ This entire account thus far represents both history and future

- *Throughout history, it has been the faithful witness of the martyrs that has led to the conversion of a great number of people to the Church*
- *As Tertullian in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century said: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church"*
- *It also appears to prophesy that before the end, the Church's powerfully anointed witness will bring a large number of conversions, the fruit of its steadfast endurance, its commitment to its prophetic mission and by the testimony of its martyrs.*

# The seventh trumpet (11:15-19)

- We recall from 10:6 the words of the angel: “When you hear the seventh angel blow his trumpet, the mysterious plan of God shall be fulfilled.”
  - *We have reached that moment at the end. The time for repentance has passed, and now comes the day of judgment for the wicked and the day of salvation for the faithful of Christ*
  - *The ‘loud voices in heaven’ now announce in dramatic fashion that the long-awaited for day has arrived*
  - *We have seen this moment before in chapter 7. Now we’ll see it from a slightly different perspective. (And we’ll see it again, in its most glorious version, in chapters 21-22)*
- The “world”
  - *Often in Scripture, the ‘world’ does not refer to the physical earth*
  - *It refers to the forces opposed to God and to the field of spiritual battle through which the faithful must navigate*
  - *The devil is described as the ‘ruler’ of the world (Jn 12:31), holding temporary dominion in this arena.*
  - *No more...*

# The seventh trumpet (11:15-19)

- “The world now belongs to our Lord and to his Anointed”
  - *Anointed, referring to Christ, and in a particular way, to those who are part of his Body, the Church, who will share in his reign*
  - *Of course, the world always belonged to God, but now the evil influences, mysteriously allowed by God to flourish since the Fall, are utterly eradicated by the power of God, who will now “reign forever and ever.”*
  - *Every kind of evil – human, diabolical, physical, social, etc. – is swept away*
  
- Worship in heaven
  - *In response, the 24 elders, as we saw in chapters 4-5, prostrate themselves before God’s throne in worship*
  - *The triumph of God is complete, and all the redeemed, vindicated from all they have suffered, exult and shout for joy before the throne*
  - *No greater moment of happiness or exultation can be conceived than the moment when the Kingdom comes (assuming we are within it!)*
  - *Imagine that moment from the perspective of those outside!*

# The seventh trumpet (11:15-19)

## ■ “Who is and who was”

- *Notice the change in the words of praise of God*
- *Before: “Who is and who was and who is to come.” (4:8)*
- *Now that he has come in his glorious finality and fullness, the phrase “who is to come” no longer applies*
- *“You have assumed your great power; you have established your reign” – it’s now in the past tense! The hope of the future has now happened*

## ■ Summary of the final battle

- *Everything now is in the past tense*
- *“The nations raged,” referring to the ‘inhabitants of the earth’ who fought against God and violently attacked the two witnesses (the Church)*
- *“But your wrath has come” – the inhabitants who did not repent (after all that happened and all the patience of God) now receive just judgment*

# The seventh trumpet (11:15-19)

## ■ Summary of the final battle

- *“The time for the dead to be judged” – those who died in God’s friendship or were martyred as faithful witnesses to God will receive their recompense and reward*
- *Keep in mind – Judgment Day will be a happy day for the righteous! Their longsuffering and patient endurance will be fantastically rewarded, far beyond anything they could imagine*
- *But it is a very bad day for the wicked, those who “destroy the earth,” for they themselves will be destroyed. Their sufferings will be described later in chapter 20*

## ■ God’s temple is opened”

- *The innermost part, the Holy of Holies, in which God was physically present, is now opened wide*
- *The “ark of the covenant,” the most potent symbol of God’s presence among his people, is now revealed*

# The seventh trumpet (11:15-19)

## ■ God's temple is opened"

- *Reminiscent of the tearing of the curtain in the Holy of Holies at the moment of Jesus' death on the cross (Mt 27:51). Anything that separates us from God (evil, sin) is destroyed, and friendship and intimacy with God is restored*
- *This event is accompanied by those geological and atmospheric signs (earthquakes, lightning, etc.) associated with God's action and presence.*

# Looking ahead

- We're only halfway through the book!
- We know evil will be defeated, but how God will do it, how the faithful will need to endure, and what will become of the devil, his minions and those who follow him have yet to be seen
- The third woe begins with the seventh trumpet, signaling the end and the vindication of the righteous
- What becomes of the wicked is symbolized in the pouring forth of the seven bowls of God's wrath, to come in chapters 15-20
- In chapters 12-14, we will see what the evil forces have been up to and how they will make the Church suffer
- We will also see the three main antagonists of evil – the devil (dragon), the beast and the false prophet

# Next week...

- Class next Wednesday, February 10
- Coming up...
  - *The Woman and the Dragon*
  - *The Beast*
  
- Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.