

Dr. David L. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 15,

Revelation 10-11: Trumpets and Interlude

6-Min. Video Overview

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Alright, let's dive into some of the most vivid, and let's be honest, kind of confusing imagery in the entire Bible. We're talking about the wild visions in Revelation chapters 10 and 11. To help us untangle all of it, we're going to lean on the insights of scholar Dr. Dave Mathewson to make sense of a massive army, a bittersweet scroll, and two really mysterious witnesses.

Okay, so we're going to kick things off with a number that just, wow, it just jumps right off the page: 200 million. Now, this isn't just some random number thrown in there. No, in one of the book's most dramatic visions, this is the actual size of a massive army of horsemen that gets unleashed on the earth.

So for centuries, right, this has had people scratching their heads, trying to figure it out: which country on earth could possibly put together an army of 200 million? But what if, what if trying to pinpoint a specific nation is asking the wrong question entirely? This is where Dr. Mathewson comes in, and he basically says, hold on, you're missing the point. He argues that looking for a literal army misses how symbolic this book is.

He points out that this cavalry shares a lot of features with an earlier plague of demonic locusts, which suggests we're not dealing with a human army at all, but with some kind of supernatural demonic force. And I love how Mathewson explains the number itself. He says we should think about it like we use the word gazillion.

I mean, when you say there's a gazillion cars on the road, you're not giving a precise traffic report, right? You're just saying it's an uncountable, overwhelming number. And that's exactly what's happening here. It's apocalyptic language for a force so huge, it's just beyond our ability to comprehend.

Okay, so if this is a symbolic, demonic onslaught, then what's the point? Why unleash this horde in the first place? Well, the vision presents these plagues as a kind of harsh wake-up call. It's a lot like the plagues back in ancient Egypt, you know? The whole idea is to expose just how powerless and, frankly, dark all the idol worship is. So the ultimate goal here isn't just destruction for destruction's sake.

It's more like a severe mercy designed to shock people into repentance, to turn them back to God. But here's the absolute kicker in the story. You'd think that would work, right? Nope.

Despite seeing all these horrific consequences right in front of them, humanity just digs in its heels. They refuse to repent, hardening their hearts in a way that sounds an awful lot like the story of Pharaoh. And this gets to a really deep, crucial point.

The way Revelation paints it, Final Judgment isn't about God dragging unwilling people to their doom, kicking and screaming. Instead, it's shown as the tragic end result of humanity's own choice. They're shown the truth, and they'd rather face total annihilation than give up their idols and acknowledge God.

Now, just when things are getting super intense- I mean, the story is at a total fever pitch- the author hits the pause button. Just like that. The seventh and final trumpet blast is delayed, and we get this narrative interlude in chapter 10.

And you can see the structure here, plain as day. After those first six trumpets, we get this pause. And listen, this isn't just some random timeout.

Dr. Mathewson argues this interlude is placed here for a very specific reason: to help us interpret the very plagues we just witnessed. So what's it trying to do? Well, it's here to answer a huge question that's just hanging in the air. What is the ultimate reason for all this judgment? And also, where are God's people in the middle of all this chaos? The interlude kicks off with this absolutely stunning vision: a mighty angel, who a lot of scholars, like Mathewson, think is actually Christ himself.

And he's holding a small scroll. And this is key. It's an open scroll.

And this is a huge deal. This isn't just any book. This is the plan of God, now unsealed.

If you remember back in chapter 5, this thing was locked up tight with seven seals, and only the Lamb was worthy to open it. And now, its contents are ready to be revealed. And then things get, well, they get weird.

In a classic apocalyptic move, straight out of the playbook of the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel, John, the author, is told to physically eat the scroll. Yeah, literally consume God's message. And the taste of this scroll tells a story.

It's sweet in John's mouth, which represents the good news of salvation. But then, it turns his stomach sour, symbolizing the bitterness of judgment. And let's be clear: while salvation is part of the message, that sourness, that judgment, is the overwhelmingly dominant theme here.

So this whole act of eating the scroll, it brings us right to the heart of everything. The message John has just literally ingested is about to reveal the ultimate reason why those terrifying plagues are happening to begin with. So what is that message? It's the story of God's two faithful witnesses.

They go out, they speak God's truth to the world, and how does the world respond? With rejection, persecution, and finally, they murder them. But what's truly bone-chilling is that the people of the earth actually celebrate their deaths. They throw parties and exchange gifts, like it's some kind of global holiday.

Okay, so let's put all the puzzle pieces together now. We've got the gazillion horsemen; that's demonic judgment on idolatry. We have humanity's flat-out refusal to repent; that's their hardened choice.

We have the sour scroll, hammering home that the message is mainly about judgment. And it all leads back to what happened to the two murdered witnesses. And that, right there, is the big reveal.

The whole point. Those terrifying plagues aren't random. They are presented as God's direct response to how the world treats his messengers.

The judgment comes because the world rejects, persecutes, and ultimately murders those who speak God's truth. And that leaves us with a really challenging thought to chew on, doesn't it? In a book filled with cosmic power, the ultimate trigger for divine justice isn't some big show of force. It's the world's response to suffering and faithfulness.

It really makes you wonder: what does that say about what truly matters in the end?