

Revelation 1 – The Vision of Christ

Feb 1, 2004

Pastor David

Scripture Texts: Revelation 1:4b-20

Purpose: To open our eyes to Jesus, who dwells among the churches with power so that we might be strengthened in our witness to the world.

As we see Christ as a priest / witness, and king / judge we will embrace our roles as witnesses and our destiny as rulers with Christ

Explaining the Imagery:

The following notes explain some of the more prominent symbols:

The Number Seven: Is used throughout the book to refer to completeness, fullness or perfection. The seven Spirits (vs. 4) suggests perfection and full presence of God. The seven churches, while historical churches are also representative of the universal church.

The Lampstands: We are told in vs. 20 that they represent the churches. The image of a lampstand connects with the temple, suggesting that as God was present in the temple, Jesus is present among his churches. As lampstands, the churches are to shine their light as witnesses in the world. One is also reminded of Zechariah 4, which portrays a single lampstand with seven lamps. This connection suggests the churches shine not by their own might and power, but by God's Spirit. (Zech 4:6)

One like a Son of Man: This can merely mean that he appeared to be human, however the title "son of man" is another name for the messiah. It was used by Jesus during his earthly ministry. It was first used in Daniel 7:13 in reference to the messiah who would rule with God's authority.

Connection with Daniel 10:4-6: The vision of Christ has many parallels with the Daniel's vision of an angel. This should not imply that Jesus is merely an angel but rather that both visions are referring to heavenly glory.

Priest, King and Judge: Different aspects of the vision point to Jesus as priest, king and judge. His garments are priest's garments, his white hair suggests purity and his standing among lampstands suggests the temple. The keys, sword, voice and feet of bronze suggest power as a king. The blazing eyes and sword also suggest his role as judge.

Stars and Angels: We are told in vs. 20 that the 7 stars represent the angels of the 7 churches. This reference to angels suggests that churches have representatives in the heavenly realm. The idea is probably meant to again point us to spiritual realities.

Revelation 2-3 – Letters to the 7 Churches

Feb 8, 2004

Pastor David

Scripture Texts: Revelation 2:1-3:22

Purpose: To challenge us as the church to endure persecution, avoid compromising with the world and to wake up from complacency, that we might fully honor Christ by being his faithful witness and ultimately rejoice with him as we overcome the world.

Explaining the Imagery:

Overall Pattern of the Letters:

Greeting: To the angel of the church in ...
Description of Christ: These are the of the words of him who...
Encouragement / Rebuke I know...
Promise to Overcomers He who overcomes I will...
Challenge to listen He who has an ear...

To the angel of the church in... These letters are addressed to the angels, who are the spiritual representatives of the specific churches. This is done to show that we as a church have a connection to the spiritual realm. It is clear that the content of the messages are directed to the people in the church.

The Descriptions of Christ: These descriptions generally refer back to the vision of Christ in chapter 1. The specific qualities of Christ mentioned for each specific church connect with the situation in that church. Remember that as we see Christ for who he is, we are strengthened to be who we are called to be.

Encouragements and Rebukes: The three general themes of the seven letters have to do with, persevering under persecution, resisting worldliness and waking up from complacency. In general these letters call the churches to be faithful witnesses for Christ in a society that is hostile to the gospel.

Nicolaitans, Balaam, Jezebel: Historians have not fully identified who the Nicolaitans are. The general thought is that they were a group that was advocating that Christians could participate in pagan rituals etc. The names Balaam and Jezebel are symbolic names from the Old Testament and represent people that tried to pull God people into idolatry. The basic concern here is that some of the churches were having their witness compromised by their involvement in pagan rituals.

Promises to the Overcomers: This is another word for victory / conquering. As Christians we are called to be overcomers. This calls for perseverance in being witnesses for Christ. Most of the promises given in these letters connect to images which come

from the final chapters of the book. They emphasize eternal salvation and the blessings of being in God presence.

He who has an ear... This is a call to spiritual discernment. It is a call to recognize the truth of what is being said. Notice that the call is to hear what the Spirit says to the churches (plural). This point to the fact that these letters were not merely for the particular historical churches, but each message is a message to all churches.

Connection to the Rest of the Book: The themes of these letters are the central themes of the overall book. The coming visions are intended to encourage the persecuted, challenge the complacent and call compromisers to renewed faithfulness. All are called to stand as faithful witnesses and are promised an eternal future in the presence of God

1. Ephesus: (Danger of Complacency)

Description of Christ: Described in context of stars and lampstands indicating that he is close to the church and is calling for faithful witnesses. They need to know that Christ is near to them

Encourage / Rebuke: The Ephesians have not compromised themselves by accepting false teaching or following idolatry with the Nicolaitans, nor have they given into persecution. Their greatest danger is a decline in love for Christ.

Promise: Eating from the tree of life is a picture of salvation and continuance in the presence of God. They need to see this invitation to be close with God and satisfied by him.

2. Smyrna: (Danger of Persecution)

Description of Christ: Described as First and Last and one who died and came to life again. They need to know that God is sovereign overall and that death need not be feared

Encourage / Rebuke: One of two churches not rebuked. They are under persecution from Jews

Promise: They need to see that even if they die, their faithfulness will protect them from eternal death.

3. Pergamum: (Danger of Compromise)

Description of Christ: Reference to sword is a threat of being judged by the truth of God's word

Encourage / Rebuke: Although faithful under persecution, they are compromising their witness through involvement with pagan practices.

Promise: Most difficult to understand. Hidden manna suggest being fed by God rather than idol feast. White stone connects with a vote of acquittal. New name suggest membership in Christ's eternal city.

4. Thyatira: (Danger of Compromise)

Description of Christ: Blazing Eyes and Bronze feet suggest judgment and power. Need to be warned

Encourage / Rebuke: Again there is rebuke as to unfaithfulness to God through participation in pagan society. A little more severe than Pergamum.

Promise: They are offered authority instead of judgment. Will rule with Christ rather than judged by him

5. Sardis (Danger of Complacency)

Description of Christ: The Seven spirits and stars suggest the nearness of Christ and his knowledge of the truth about them.

Encourage / Rebuke: No mention of persecution or temptation to compromise. This has led the church into complacency. They have stopped obeying and seeking Christ and need to wake up.

Promise: Dressed in white and book of life is an invitation to purity.

6. Philadelphia: (Danger of Persecution)

Description of Christ: Reference to keys of David show Christ as sovereign ruler. They need to see that Christ is king.

Encourage / Rebuke: As with Smyrna, there is no rebuke. Again there is persecution from Jews. Interestingly persecuted churches not rebuked.

Promise: Encouraged that they will be firmly planted in God presence.

7. Laodicea (Danger of Complacency)

Description of Christ: Christ as faithful witness contrasts their lack of witness.

Encourage / Rebuke: Only church with no encouragements and only rebuke, although rebuke is a sign of love. Lukewarmness does not necessarily mean lack of zeal, but rather a picture of being an ineffective witness. They have a totally opposite view of their own condition.

Promise: Need to see that a glorious future is still open to them.

Revelation 4-5 – The Throne and the Lamb

Feb 15, 2004

Pastor David

Scripture Texts: Revelation 4:1 to 5:14

Purpose: To open our eyes to a glorious heavenly reality, where God is on the throne and Christ is Lord over history. This picture should inspire worship God, and build in us an anticipation to one day be worshiping God before the throne..

Explaining the Imagery:

The Throne: The throne is the center of the entire vision and clearly refers to God. The choice of the word throne emphasizes God's sovereignty over everything. Notice that God is not specifically described, but is rather described in terms of glory as like precious stones.

Twenty four Elders: Are not easily identified. Some argue that they are angels, but the term elder is never used of angels. Also the white robes suggest redeemed people. It is probably best to think of these elders as representative of all believers. These elders have crowns and thrones, thus ruling with God, but are clearly subservient to God as they bow and cast down their crowns. The number 24 perhaps refers to the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles. This would suggest that the elders are not specific people, but that they represent the whole people of God.

Four Living Creatures: These creatures clearly connect with the cherubim in Ezekiel 1. Whereas in Ezekiel, however, the creatures each have four faces, in Revelation, they each have a distinct face. The creatures are likely representative of all created beings. They are clearly connected to God. Being covered with eyes suggests God's omniscience. Regardless, their role is to give God the unending praise due his name.

The Scroll: The book which is unsealed in chapter six, is the book containing God's plan of judgment and salvation. In many respects the remaining chapters of the book of revelation describe the contents of this book. Only the lamb is worthy to open it for by him all men are judged and redeemed.

The Lamb: Clearly a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ. His death was a sacrificial death like a lamb. Notice that this lamb looks like it had been slain.

The Lion is a Lamb: Notice that in verse 5 we are told that the Lion of Judah is worthy to open the scroll, but in verse 6, the lion turn out to be a slain lamb. This is a picture of Christ's ironic power, and our power as believers. We do not overcome by power of war or economic, but rather through suffering. Our victory is found in remaining faithful to

Christ even to death, just as Christ conquered Satan through giving up his life as a sacrifice.

Seven horns and Seven eyes: Explicitly connected with the Spirit of God. Suggestive of God's all encompassing power to save. There is a connection to Zechariah 3:9, which reads, "See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it," says the LORD Almighty, "and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day." This likely suggests that the lamb's seven eyes refer to his all encompassing power to redeem people from their sins.

Worship of the Lamb: In 5:9-14, the elders, living creatures, angels and all created things worship the lamb. This is highly significant and points to the fact that Jesus is equal to God. In fact in verse 13, the Lamb and the one who sits on the throne are equally praised.

Summary:

It is hard to think of a more God centered passage of scripture. The very picture of the throne and lamb surrounded by worshipers shows this focus on God. He is glorious beyond description. He is praised eternally by his creatures for his creation and redemption. In fact God's reason for creating and redeeming is that he might be honored and glorified.

This passage challenges us to have a radically God centered perspective. The greatest thing and most enjoyable thing we can do is worship God. We need no other reason aside from the fact that God is worthy.

Revelation 6 – The First Six Seals Opened

Mar 14, 2004

Pastor David

Scripture Texts: Revelation 6:1-17

Purpose: By describing the destructive forces of history, the security of God's people and the terror of future judgment this passage challenges us to find our security in God and not in this world.

Explaining the Imagery:

The Seals: What is the role of the seven seals within the wider scope of the book? I do not take Revelation as a blueprint for the future, but rather as symbolically describing the character of the time from Christ's first coming to his return. Approaching the book in a more cyclical way, I understand that Revelation circles back and covers the same ground again. I am beginning to see that the main body of visions in the book of Revelation (chapters 6-22) contain three main cycles (6-11, 12-16 and 17-22) Within each of these cycles there are two main movements, the first part describing the time from Christ's resurrection to the inauguration of final judgment and the second part focusing more on final judgment and salvation. As such, I understand the seven seals as generally describing the character of the time up until the inauguration of final judgment and salvation. They do not so much refer to specific events as they do to wider destructive forces.

The Four Horsemen: It is best to see all four horsemen as related to each other. They are not necessarily sequential but rather come as a whole package. Because they represent such general trials such as war and famine, they seem applicable to every age of history. Therefore it is best not to see them as predicting the first events of the future end times, but rather as descriptive of all times.

White Horse / Rider with Bow and Crown: Although some take this as a reference to Christ because the horse is white, it seems that the four horsemen are related to each other and therefore since the other three clearly represent destructive forces, this first horseman also represents a destructive force. Because of parallels with the Parthian mounted archers which threatened the empire and the explicit mention in the text, this horseman represents the destructive force of conquest.

A more futurist interpretation sees this rider as representing a future antichrist who will rule the world during the time before Christ's return. This is a good possibility, however, the following horses seem much too general to allow for such a specific identity. Furthermore, understanding the seals as representing all of history after Christ's resurrection, I would argue that each horse represents general destructive forces and in the case of this first horse, that it is representative of conquest or militarism.

Red Horse / Rider with Sword: Representative of war or rebellion, not a specific future war, but war in general as it affects people throughout history.

Black Horse / Rider with Scales: Representative of famine or economic hardship. Again not a specific famine but rather as it affects people throughout history.

Pale Horse / Death and Hades: Specifically called death, perhaps representative of pestilence and disease.

Souls of Martyrs under Altar: Being under altar they are shown as being protected by God. Their cry “how long” is not a cry of vengeance but rather a call for justice.

Sixth Seal / Earthquake / Cosmic Signs: Best understood figuratively as being not so much the last judgment itself, but rather the inauguration of the final judgment which is imminent. The language of earthquakes and celestial signs are used throughout scripture to signify judgment. Probably not a literal description, because even as every mountain is removed in verse 14, people hide in the mountains in verse 15.

Summary:

These seals represent the destructive forces of history which have occurred and will occur up until the verge of the final judgment. The main thrust of the passage is found in the contrasting questions of the martyrs and the people of the earth. On the one hand we can put our confidence in God and although we may face death, be assured that justice will come. Or we can find our security in this world, perhaps sparing our lives, but ultimately being unable to stand before God’s judgment.

Having our eyes opened to the destructive forces of history, the promised vindication of the saints and the devastation of final judgment, the choice should be clear.

Revelation 7 – God’s People

Mar 21, 2004

Pastor David

Scripture Texts: Revelation 7:1- 8:1

Purpose: In seeing the spiritual protection of God’s people, we are encouraged to trust God and find comfort in our glorious future.

Explaining the Imagery:

How does Chapter 7 Fit into the Structure of the Book? This chapter is commonly understood as a parenthesis or interlude between the 6th and 7th seals. The passage acts as a bridge between the tribulations revealed in the first six seals and the judgments that will be revealed in the seventh seal or seven trumpets. This chapter represents a change in focus from tribulation and judgment to the protection and blessedness of believers.

The Four Winds: Clearly destructive forces of evil. Given that the word for wind is also the word for spirit, these four winds could be four spirits. They are not referred to again in the book. They are held in check until God’s people are protected. Given that verse 3 indicates that the four winds will harm the land sea and trees, it is probably best to see that these four winds correspond to the first four trumpets (8:7-12) which themselves harm the trees, land and waters.

Seal on Forehead: From 14:1, the seal is said to be the name of God and the Lamb. The seal is likely figurative and represents God’s ownership and protection. This protection does not guarantee freedom from all harm, for we know from 6:11, that there will be more martyrs. The protection however is spiritual, in that it guards them from losing their faith and it exempts them from receiving God wrath (9:4)

The 144,000: Given that most numbers in the book are figurative, this number which is the square of 12 multiplied by 1000, is also figurative. These numbers suggest completeness. The 144,000 represent the entirety of God’s people alive on earth during the last days. The fact that these people come from the twelve tribes of Israel does not indicate that these people are Jewish believers. Rather the book of Revelation and indeed much of the New Testament teaches that those who believe in Jesus are the true Israel. (Rev 3:9, Rom 2:28-29) Also because in the OT census were conducted as a way to count the military strength of the people, this census probably indicates that God’s people are sealed for spiritual warfare. They are marked off to overcome evil through their faithful witness.

The Great Multitude: This is a vision of the same people from a slightly different perspective. Whereas the sealed 144,000 represent God’s people preparing for spiritual war, the vision of the great multitude looks ahead to God’s people enjoying the victory of God. This multitude is described as those who have come out of the great tribulation (vs. 14) As such this multitude represents the victorious end time believers / martyrs. By

extension, however, this applies to all believers. Although Revelation focuses mainly on the last generation of believers / martyrs, the promises and blessings that those believers receive will be available to all who remain faithful to Christ.

Summary: This portion of the book of Revelation seems to have a future perspective. It talks about the people of God who will be alive during the final days, the great tribulation. That generation will be given spiritual protection (signified by the sealing) and will enjoy the blessedness of God's victory (signified by the celebrations of the great multitude). Although this passage speaks about a reality that is still to come, by extension, we can claim these same promises. We too are marked out for spiritual warfare through bearing faithful witness to Christ. We too, as God's people receive God's protection and will one day enjoy his presence.

It would be a mistake to say that this material applies to a future generation and is therefore irrelevant to us. While we may not see the last days, we are called to be faithful in our own day.

Revelation 8 / 9 - The First 6 Trumpets

Apr 18, 2004

Pastor David

Scripture Texts: Revelation 8:1-9:21

Purpose: To paint a terrible picture of coming supernatural judgment which serves to challenge people to repent and to reveal the hardness of heart in those who refuse to repent.

Explaining the Imagery:

How do the trumpets fit into the overall book? The seven trumpets represent the judgment of God as mediated through the work of angels and demons. Whereas the seven seals (especially the four horseman) represent forces of destruction and tribulation that more or less flow out of the sins of men and the catastrophes of the natural world, the trumpets are more explicitly supernatural. Whereas the seals can be understood to represent human history past present and future, the trumpets refer to the future final days leading up to final judgment and salvation. Furthermore, the trumpets seem specifically focused on unbelievers, especially in light of the fact that in chapter 7, believers are sealed by God as a protection from judgment and wrath.

The Seventh Seal / Silence: The final seal, ushers in a half our of silence, which serves to build tension and expectation as a calm before the storm. This seal is not devoid of content, but rather is a setting of the stage for divine judgment. At this time, the seven angels with trumpets are revealed. The fact that divine judgment is in view is emphasized by the angel (verse 5) who casts down his censer amidst thunder lighting and earthquakes, all of which represent divine power and judgment.

The First Four Trumpets: The first four trumpets form a set. They represent indirect judgments, in that their focus is upon the natural order and not directly on people. They serve as warnings to people that greater more terrible things are coming. They offer time for people to repent. The mention of only partial destruction (one third) shows that they are warnings. They are reminiscent of the Exodus plagues in Egypt (hail, blood water, darkness and even locusts in the 5th trumpet) and serve a similar role in calling for repentance and revealing the power of God.

First Trumpet: Difficult to see this as specifically figurative of a massive hail storm or other catastrophe. Rather it is reminiscent of the Exodus plague, and like that plague it is supernatural in origin.

Second Trumpet: Again supernatural in origin. Perhaps a picture of a meteorite, but unlikely since it is targeted on the oceans.

Third Trumpet: Again supernatural. The star probably represents an angelic being. This association is made often in the book (1:20; 9:1 ; 12:4) The name wormwood refers to a bitter plant.

Fourth Trumpet: Again a connection with Exodus. As with the first three trumpet, we should not look for specific natural or human activities which would explain these results, but just as in the Exodus, see these as supernatural plagues which serve to warn people of coming judgment.

Woes: The remaining trumpets are separated from the first four by calling them woes. As we shall see the intensity of the fifth and sixth trumpets are much greater and directly focused on unbelievers. There is a transition away from warnings to torment and punishment.

Fifth Trumpet / Demon Locusts: Rather than attempt to see these creatures as symbolic of ancient or modern military machinery, they should be understood as demonic activity. The descriptions are primarily intended to evoke fear.

Fallen Star: An angel or demon, perhaps Satan himself.

Abyss: A sort of prison for demons, it's being opened ushers in greater demon activity on earth.

Locusts: Often employed as a judgment from God (Joel 2) These are not literal locusts, for they torment men not plants. In fact they only torment those not sealed by God. Coming out of the abyss these locusts represent demons.

Description of Locusts: The description of these locusts makes it impossible to hold that these locusts represent barbarians or even modern military equipment. Some of the description could be an exaggeration of locust qualities some of which find parallel in Joel such as teeth like lion (Joel 1:6) and sound like chariots (Joel 2:4-5)

Torment / Sting: These demon locusts are not sent to kill, but only to torment. It shows us that demonic activity will increase in the final days. This torment may not be physical, but perhaps spiritual.

Abaddon / Apollyon: Hebrew and Greek words for Destruction or Destroyer. The fact that the king of these locusts is the angel from the Abyss provides further evidence that John is graphically describing demonic torment.

Sixth Trumpet / Demon Cavalry: While this trumpet may describe demonic inspired war, the equally fantastic descriptions of this cavalry places our focus on the demonic activity rather than on any human armies used by these demons.

Four Angels: Notice that in verse 15 that it is the four angels who are released to kill. John is always focusing on the spiritual realities behind events.

200,000,000 Cavalry. Literally double myriads upon myriads. This number is likely symbolic of a massive army. The fact that these angels were bound at the Euphrates suggests an army from the east. This is a common theme in the OT and may signify the final battle Armageddon.

Description of Cavalry: Again no attempt should be made to draw parallels with ancient or modern war machines. The snake tails, fire, smoke and sulfur indicate the demonic connection. The intent of John is to show the spiritual / demonic forces that lie behind this cavalry.

No Repentance: The sad truth revealed in the final verse of chapter nine is that despite the terrible nature of these plagues, that mankind is unwilling to repent and turn from its idolatry and immorality. This only reveals the full extent of the hardness of their hearts (as with Pharaoh and the Egyptians) and shows God to be righteous in his judgments. People are given fair warning.

Summary:

John paints a terrible picture of supernatural plagues and demonic activity, all of which are directed by God upon unbelievers. The imagery is intended to evoke fear and show the true spiritual character of these events. While we may not experience the terrors of these final days, this should not make us complacent, but should inspire our gratitude. Coming after the vision of the sealing of the 144,000 and the multitudes in heaven, we must also remember that as God's children we are spared from God wrath and protected from demonic attack. Again this should not lead to complacency, but should inspire boldness in witnessing for Christ our protector.

Revelation 10 / 11 – Little Scroll / Two Witnesses / 7th Trumpet

May 2, 2004

Pastor David

Scripture Texts: Revelation 10:1 – 11:19

Purpose: To encourage us as believers to be faithful witnesses to Christ by showing the role God's people will play in the days leading up to final judgment and salvation.

How does this passage fit into the overall book? Chapters 10 and 11 come between the sixth and seventh trumpets. They could be considered an extension of the sixth trumpet, but are usually understood to be a literary interlude between the final two trumpets, just as chapter 7 represents an interlude between the final two seals. In both cases, the interludes represent a change in focus towards the people of God. Chapters 10 and 11 do not fit chronologically after the sixth trumpet, but rather describe the period of the trumpets from a different perspective. While the trumpets focus on the judgment of unbelievers, chapters 10 and 11 focus on the role of God's people during this same period of time.

Overall approach: I have been employing an approach to the book of Revelation which tends towards a symbolic understanding of the various visions. There are however, many who would take a more literal approach to the visions. The contrast between these two approaches can be clearly seen in chapter 11. The identity of the two witnesses in chapter 11 can be taken symbolically as referring to the witnessing church, or more literally as referring to two specific individual prophets who will appear in the end times. We must remember that that is a difficult book like Revelation, there is room for disagreement. Although I will argue for a more symbolic approach, this is not the only way to understand the book.

Explaining the Imagery:

Another Mighty Angel (10:1): Although described in a way that suggests Christ (clouds, rainbow, face like sun, etc.) this is best understood as an angelic being. The fact that he stands over earth and sea reflects God's sovereignty. The fact that he is "another mighty angel" points us back to 5:2 where the first mighty angel is mentioned. This fact helps serve to connect the scroll mentioned in chapter 10, with the scroll from chapter 5.

A little scroll which lay open (10:2): This scroll, although referred to as a little scroll, is likely the same scroll from chapters 5 and 6. The main arguments in favor of this are: 1) the connection with mighty angels (mentioned above). 2) The parallel with Ezekiel 1:3, where Ezekiel sees a similar vision and receives a scroll from God which he eats as John eats this scroll (10:9-10). 3) Their connection gives greater continuity to the book. By connecting these two scrolls, one would argue that the content of this scroll which is yet to come in the Book of Revelation is of central importance in the book, and that all which has preceded chapter 10 is a preparation for what is yet to come.

Seven Thunders (10:3-4): We cannot speculate specifically on what the seven thunders are or would have been. Given the number 7, in connection with the seven seals, trumpets and bowls, one would assume that the seven thunders would have been another series of judgments. The fact that they are sealed up, perhaps suggests that God is showing mercy by shortening the period of judgment. This would connect well with the fact that the angel proclaims no more delay (10:6)

The Eating of the Scroll (10:8-11): Clear parallel with Ezekiel 3:1-3. The ingesting of the scroll is a figurative way of having John receive the word of God in preparation for prophesying. It tastes sweet in his mouth, because it is the word of God, but is bitter in his stomach, because the message he reveals contains judgments and persecutions. This connection with Ezekiel gives us a hint to the content of the scroll, for in Ezekiel 2:10 we are told that the scroll Ezekiel ate contained words of lament and mourning and woe. We should expect the rest of Revelation to contain a similar message.

The Content of the Scroll: Chapter 11 gives us summary of the content of the scroll, which is developed more fully in chapters 12-22. Since chapter 11 follows right after John's receiving / eating of the scroll, we would have to assume that chapter 11 forms part of the content of that scroll. However, based on the fact that in 10:11, John is told to prophesy again about many peoples, nations etc, it seems that the content of the scroll is revealed primarily in chapters 12-22.

Role of Chapter 11: Chapter 11 gives us a portrayal of the interaction between God's faithful witnesses and the godless world (11:1-13) culminating in final salvation and judgment (11:14-19). Chapter 11 plays a transitional role. On the one hand it completes the first cycle of the book by showing that the judgment of God comes because of the rejection of his witnesses and then giving a small picture of that final judgment and salvation in the seventh trumpet. On the other hand, chapter 11 acts as a summary of the remaining eleven chapters of the book, which develop in more detail the themes of that chapter, namely the relationship between God's people and the godless world and secondly final judgment and salvation.

Measuring the Temple / Trampling of City (11:1-2): In parallel with the sealing of the 144,000 in chapter 7, the measuring of the temple suggests a marking out for preservation and protection. At this point, differences between literal and symbolic interpretations arise. A more literal interpretation sees this temple as a literal Jewish temple that will be rebuilt in the end times and that the one's being protected are therefore Jewish believers and those being trampled are unbelieving Jews. A more symbolic approach sees that the temple signifies the people of God (see also 1 Cor 3:16-17, 2 Cor 6:16 and Eph 2:12-22) and therefore what this passage is saying is that God's people are spiritually protected although physically trampled.

42 Months / 1260 days / 3 ½ years: Not necessarily a literal time period, but rather signifying a limited time period where evil is active and the people of God suffer persecution. Finds its background in Daniel (7:25, 9:27, 12:7 and 11-12)

The Two Witnesses (11:3-13): Again there is a debate as to whether these two witnesses are two literal individuals or whether they signify the witnessing church. In either case, it is clear that these witnesses are calling people to repentance and proclaiming judgment. In either case these two witnesses are representative of God's people who witness for God, suffer persecution and are ultimately victorious in resurrection.

Sackcloth: Their clothing shows that they are preaching repentance

Two Olive Tree and Two lampstands: Close parallel with Zech 4 suggests that these witnesses are empowered by God's Spirit. The fact that they are called lampstands suggests that they are symbolic of the church since in Rev 1:20 churches are symbolized as lampstands

Fire, No Rain, Water into Blood and Plagues: These powers draw close parallel with Elijah and Moses. Given that in verse 10, these witnesses have tormented those who live on the earth, one might connect the plagues of the six trumpets with these two witnesses. This suggests that God's judgments come, because of the rejection of God's witnesses.

Beast from Abyss Attacks: Will be elaborated in chapter 13, but represents the Antichrist and his kingdom. More literally "attack" should be "make war with" also in Rev 13:7. Given that in Rev 13:7 the beast makes war with the saints, this gives further evidence that the two witnesses represent the people of God.

Their Resurrection: Signifies the ultimate victory of God's people

Seventh Trumpet (11:14-19): As mentioned in 10:7, this trumpet signifies the final judgment and salvation. The language of God's reign clearly refers to the final salvation. With this final trumpet we come to the end of the first major cycle in the book of Revelation.

Summary: These two chapters take on a transitional role in the book of Revelation. As John receives / eats the little scroll in Chapter 10, we are prepared for a the continuation of John's prophetic task. Understanding this scroll to be the one opened by the lamb, we are led to expect to finally see the content of this scroll. This content we argued is summarized in chapter 11 and then elaborated in chapters 12-22. In chapter 11 we see the in a limited way the major themes of chapters 12-22. We see the people of God standing in witness, yet facing persecution from the beast. We see God acting in judgment on those who reject that witness. We see God ultimately vindicating his people in resurrection and bringing judgment on his enemies.

Regardless of the specific interpretations, the challenge in this passage is to stand as faithful witness for Christ. This will lead to persecution, but will ultimately lead to victory. Although these realities are heightened in the end times, they are relevant today.

My primary reference books are The Book of Revelation by G K Beale, Revelation and the End of All Things by Craig Koester, The Book of Revelation by Robert Mounce and The Theology of the Book of Revelation by Richard Bauckham.