

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: Revelation Chapter 11: Some Notes

Chapter 11 is both important (central in some ways) and “difficult”. It is described as a summary of the rest of the book. None of these parallels is entirely apt, but Revelation is a bit like a golf narration for the non-golfer or a music narration for a non-musician. It uses unfamiliar language/terminology, and it is easy to switch off. Why can't the writer make it simple? In defence of John, first he is trying to describe “the end of the world”, and there isn't any simple terminology for that. Second, much of what John says, or rather how he says it, was familiar to his original audience.

Using long reeds as measuring rods was how things are done. Measuring things to build them. To destroy them, to protect them (not least the Temple) is almost a Biblical norm: there is lots of this. The three and a half was very familiar (See Daniel) half the perfect number 7; but in particular the siege of the Temple by the Syrian Emperor Antiochus had lasted 3.5 years (with terrible suffering but eventual victory for Judas Maccabeus). The Court of the Gentiles had been lost first in the AD 70 Temple siege by the Romans, but the Zealot Jews had fought on and hoped to survive in the Jewish-only part of the Temple. The origin of the Two Witnesses is not certain, but Moses and Elijah both controlled natural events, and were expected to return. The Kingdom of God vision is in the Psalms. The thousand years of peace is a not-unfamiliar vision. The Ark becoming visible was the ultimate symbol of God's presence among His people: the Holy of Holies revealed. (c.f. the veil of the Temple being rent in two.)

Jerusalem, the Holy City, being linked with Sodom (Rome or Babylon) and Egypt is a very effective way of commenting on good gone bad; but the core message is one of HOPE - not an easy victory or a painless one. (But then we know that the Christian life is not a bed of roses!)

Chapter 11 is a bit short in terms of reference hymns, but the three are significant: *“Come and see the shining hope”*, *“Crown Him with many crowns”*, and *“Jesus, Jesus, Jesus”*.

It might be worth reading at least the poetry parts of the chapter in more than one version. They really sing,