

REVELATION

*Seeing, Knowing and Serving Jesus Christ
Today at the Edge of History*

Chapters 10-11:14

Text: Revelation 10-11:14 - Interlude II: The Best Thing We Can Do

The Angel and the Little Scroll

10 Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. ² He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, ³ and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. ⁴ And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down."

⁵ Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. ⁶ And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay! ⁷ But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

⁸ Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land."

⁹ So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." ¹⁰ I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. ¹¹ Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."



**St. John Altarpiece
Hans Memling 1474-1478**

The Two Witnesses

11 I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshippers there. ² But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. ³ And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." ⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. ⁵ If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies.

This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. ⁶ These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

⁷ Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. ⁸ Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. ⁹ For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. ¹⁰ The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.

¹¹ But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. ¹²

Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on.

¹³ At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

¹⁴ The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.

Read & Reflect - 10-11:14

First Reading/First Impression:

This passage uplifts & encourages me because...
 frightens & discourages me because...

Second Reading/The Big Idea:

What human activity takes center stage in this interlude (see 10:11; 11:3, 7 & 10)? Why is it so important? What happens as a result? (see 11:134 & compare to 9:20-21)

Ezekiel 2:9-3:4

⁹ Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, ¹⁰ which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe.

³ And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel." ² So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat.

³ Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it." So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.

⁴ He then said to me: "Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak my words to them.

Zechariah 4:1-6, 12-14

⁴ Then the angel who talked with me returned and wakened me, as a man is wakened from his sleep. ² He asked me, "What do you see?"

I answered, "I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights. ³ Also there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left."

⁴ I asked the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?"

⁵ He answered, "Do you not know what these are?"

"No, my lord," I replied.

⁶ So he said to me, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty..."

¹² Again I asked him, "What are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?"

¹³ He replied, "Do you not know what these are?"

"No, my lord," I said.

¹⁴ So he said, "These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth."

Search

10:2 - What is the "little scroll"? Where have we seen a "scroll" before?

10:4-6 - Why might John have been commanded not to write about the "seven thunders"? How might this relate to what the angel says at the end of v.6?

10:8-11 - What is John supposed to do with the "scroll"? What might this act mean? What is he then told to do (v.11 -- compare to Ezekiel chapters 2-3)?

11:3-6 - Who are the "two witnesses" ("lampstands" / "olive trees")? (What or who are the "two lampstands" & "two olive trees" in Zechariah 4:1-14)?

11:7 - What happens to the "two witnesses"? When?!?!

11:8-10 - Why are the witnesses so badly treated? How might prophets simply speaking out the truth of God "torment" people? (Who is tormented?)

11:11-13 - What ends up happening to the two witnesses? Then what happens in the earth (compare to Isaiah 6:13, Amos 5:3 & I Kings 19:18)? How do people in the earth respond this time (compare to 9:20-21)!?!?

Apply

1. What might followers of Jesus today expect to happen as they speak out for the truth and for God?

2. Why should they (we) go ahead and do so?

3. Who is one person you will 1) pray for and then 2) tell about the love of God who calls us to turn to Him in faith?

From Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, Chapter 4 (pp.80-84):

*The scroll is sealed with seven seals (5:1) and the Lamb opens the seals, one by one, from 6:1 to 8:1. **But the events that occur at the opening of the seals are not, as interpreters of Revelation have too often supposed, the contents of the scroll. It would be a very odd scroll whose contents could be progressively revealed by the opening of a series of seals. The events of the seven seal-openings merely accompany the opening of the seals. The opening of the seals one by one is a literary device enabling John to narrate a series of vision which prepare for the revelation of the contents of the scroll. Neither the series of seven judgments which accompany the seal-openings, nor the series of seven trumpet-blasts which are closely attached to the opening of the seventh, final seal (cf. 8:1-6), is the content of the scroll...***

...The scroll itself, now opened, reappears in 10:2, 8-10. Most interpreters have been misled by the word used in 10:2, 9-10 (BIBLARIDION is diminutive in form, but like many diminutive forms in the Greek of this period, need not differ in meaning from BIBLION, which is used in 5:1-9; 10:8) and have supposed the scroll of chapter 10 to be a different scroll from that of chapter 5. But John carefully indicates their identity. The angel who brings the scroll down from heaven (10:1-2) is called "another mighty angel" (10:1) in order to make a literary connection with 5:1-9, where the first "mighty angel" is mentioned (5:2)...

[Bauckham goes on to compare John's vision with the inaugural vision of Ezekiel where the prophet also eats a scroll God has opened for him (Ezekiel 1-3).]

"...It is not until chapter 10 that the main content of the prophetic revelation John communicates in his book is given to him. All that has preceded is preparatory -- necessary to the understanding of this revelation, but not itself the revelation. Recognizing this is a vital, though neglected, key to understanding the book of Revelation.

The communication of the content of the scroll to John takes place as the first part of the extended interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpet blasts (10:1-11:13).

[Here Bauckham notes that this interlude is associated with the 6th rather than the 7th trumpet call. He also points out that the judgments are related to the vision of God of ch. 4, that they are limited warning judgments, "designed to bring humanity to repentance," and that "they do not in fact have this effect." Then with the seventh trumpet and the ensuing seven bowls of wrath what we see are "total, not limited, judgments (16:2-21) accomplishing the final annihilation of the unrepentant."

So, here at chapter 10 what is revealed to John is the content of the scroll:]

This is God's hitherto unrevealed purpose for achieving what judgments alone have failed to achieve: the repentance of the world. Having eaten the scroll, John is told to reveal its contents by prophesying: "You must prophesy against about many peoples and nations and languages and kings" (10:11)... John's prophecy is initially a revelation to the churches of the role they are to play as prophetic witnesses to the nations. But also, indirectly, it is the content of the prophetic witness of the churches to the nations.

The content of the scroll is revealed in summary immediately in 11:1-13. This passage therefore contains, in nuce, the central message of John's whole prophecy. It is placed here to indicate how the church's witness to the nations intervenes before the final judgment, the seventh trumpet, with which God's kingdom finally comes (11:15-19)...

God's kingdom is to come not simply by saving an elect people who acknowledge his rule from a rebellious world over which his kingdom prevails merely by extinguishing the rebels. It is to come as the sacrificial witness of the elect people who already acknowledge God's rule brings the rebellious nations also to acknowledge his rule. The people of God have been redeemed from all the nations (5:9) in order to bear prophetic witness to all the nations" (11:3-13).



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Summary... The 1st Interlude (Ch. 7) concerned itself with identifying and affirming *who God's people are* in the midst of earthly

calamity. "Who is able to stand?" (6:17) was the question it answered. Now this second interlude addresses the question *what are God's people to do? What is the essential activity of God's Church?* In this interlude we find the "pastoral center" of Revelation, the "so what" of the Book for God's people then and now!

10:1 - "**mighty angel**"... same terms as we saw in 5:2 then referring to the one who asked loudly "who is worthy to open the scroll?"... "**rainbow**" = symbol of God's mercy from the story of Noah... "**cloud... fiery pillars**" - may refer back to the Exodus story

10:2 - "**little scroll**"... the identity of this scroll is the first key question in this passage. Many commentators believe it is a new and different one. Richard Bauckham makes a good case for it being the now-opened scroll from the throne room scene (see p.3)...

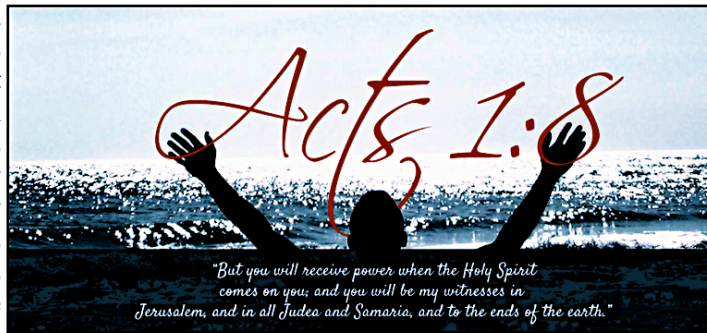
10:3-7 - "**seven thunders**"... This new set of seven follows the seals and the trumpets (see "Seals, Trumpets & Bowls" chart)... "**do not write**"... It is a mystery why John is told not to write about this group of seven... It may be a way of indicating the infinite mystery and unfathomable depths of God's plans which in the final analysis defy any final analysis! (The groups of seven could go on forever! But God's angels says "**There will be no more delay!... when the seventh angels is about to sound his trumpet... the mystery of God will be accomplished...**" The 7th trumpet will usher in the final events including the seven bowls of God's final and full history-ending wrath.)

10:8-10 - "**Take [the scroll] and eat it**"... This is "a way of saying 'read, learn, mark, and inwardly digest'" (Metzger, p.68) the contents

of the scroll... The command is reminiscent of the call of the prophet Ezekiel (ch. 2-3)... There the action is preparatory to the prophet going and speaking for God to His people Israel... "**sweet... sour**"... hearing God's message is a joy to John. Knowing of His wrath fills him with sorrow...

10:11 - "**You must prophesy again!**" The key activity of this interlude section is prophecy, speaking for God, witnessing to the truth... Like Ezekiel and all the others before him, John is to speak the truth to the world that needs to hear it (and so far isn't listening)... He needs to tell them why the plagues of judgment are coming... "**peoples, nations, languages and kings**"... four-fold name points to the full breadth of created humanity...

11:1 - "**temple of God**"... the actual Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed by Roman soldiers more than a decade earlier... "Temple" is being used figuratively here. It represents the "people of God" (The Church! - for similar use of "temple" see 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Pet. 2:5 & Eph. 2:21)... John is to "**measure**" it which may be a way of saying he is to revive and restore them, call them to be "in or out"...



11:2 - "**42 months**"... = 3 1/2 years or 1,260 days (42 months X 30 days)... This amount of time had become symbolic for a limited period of great wickedness and Gentile domination (see Daniel 9:27, 7:25 & 12:7 -- "Time, times and half a time")... Those "outside" the "temple," the Gentiles," will trouble God's people for this amount of time...

11:3-6 - "**two witnesses**"... Their identity is the second key question of

this passage... Two is the number of people necessary in Jewish law for a valid testimony... Probably, this refers symbolically to the whole of God's people giving valid testimony to the truth of God in Jesus Christ the Lord and Savior... "**the two olive trees and the two lampstands**"... point to Zechariah's vision concerning Zerubbabel and Joshua (see Zech. 4:1-14)... "**shut up the sky**"... like Elijah the great prophet did (2 Kings 1:10)... "**turn the waters into blood**"... like Moses the great Law-giver did (Exodus 7:17-19)... The power and importance of "**these men**" (= God's Church?!) is tremendous...

11:7-10 - "**When they have finished their testimony**"... only when they are done can they be attacked... "**the beast**"... the first mention of the great opponent of God's people in the final days... "**great city**"... Their martyrdom is likened to that of Christ in Jerusalem, symbolically called "**Sodom**" (symbol of moral decay) and "**Egypt**" (symbol of oppression and slavery)... "**3 1/2 days**"... see above... "**refuse them burial**"... act of great insult and disgrace... "**tormented**"... the truth is distasteful to the wicked...

11:11-12 - "**they stood on their feet**"... as with Jesus for whom they spoke, the suffering and death of the "two witnesses" itself becomes their most powerful testimony when they don't stay dead!... So it is with God's Church!... The resurrection is real! And so the Church's hope in Christ is an amazingly powerful reality!

11:13 - "**tenth of the city... 7,000 people**"... John is using familiar numbers to indicate great loss (see Isaiah 6:13, Amos 5:3 & 1 Kings 19:18)... "**gave glory to the God of heaven**"... (compare to 9:20-21) - What mere plagues could not accomplish, plagues plus *the witness of God's people* can and does!... WITNESS MAKES THE DIFFERENCE! It's the best thing we can do.