

A Time for Testimony Revelation 10—11

Revelation 10—14 describes the events that will occur at the middle of the seven-year tribulation. This explains John's repeated mention of the three-and-a-half-year time segment in one form or another. At the beginning of this period, the Antichrist will begin to make his conquest by promising to protect the Jews and assist in their rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. But after three-and-a-half-years, he will break his agreement, invade the temple, and begin to persecute the Jewish people.

However depressing the events of this middle segment of the tribulation may be, God is not without His witness to the world. In **Revelation 10—11** are three important testimonies: from a mighty angel (**Rev. 10:1-11**), from two special witnesses (**Rev. 11:1-14**), and from the elders in heaven (**Rev. 11:15-19**).

1. The Testimony Of The Mighty Angel (10:1-11)

More than sixty references to angels are made in Revelation. They are God's army sent to accomplish His purposes on earth. Believers today seldom think about these servants (**Heb. 1:14**), but one day in heaven we shall learn about all they did for us here.

a. **The description of the angel (vv. 1- 4).** This angel amazes us, for he has some of the characteristics that belong especially to the Lord Jesus Christ. John had seen and heard a "strong angel" (**Rev. 5:2**), and the same Greek word is here translated "mighty." All angels excel in strength (**Ps. 103:20**), but apparently some have greater power and authority than others.

- 1) We first saw the rainbow around the throne of God; now it sits like a crown on the head of this messenger. The rainbow was God's sign to mankind that He would never again destroy the world with a flood. Even in wrath, God remembers His mercy.
- 2) God is often identified with clouds. God led Israel by a glorious cloud, and dark clouds covered Sinai when the law was given. When God appeared to Moses, it was in a cloud of glory. A cloud received Jesus when He ascended to heaven (**Acts 1:9**) and, when He returns, it will be with clouds (**Rev. 1:7**).
- 3) The fact that the angel's face is "as the sun" corresponds to the Lord's description in **Revelation 1:15**. His voice like a lion suggest **Revelation 5:5**. The being could well be our lord Jesus Christ, appearing to John as a kingly angel. Jesus often appeared in Old testament as "the Angel of the Lord."

- 4) Two other characteristics would suggest identifying the angel as Jesus Christ: the book in his hand and the awesome posture that he assumed . The little book contains the rest of the prophetic message that John will deliver. Since our Lord was the only One worthy to take the scroll and break the seals (**Rev. 5:5ff.**), it might well be concluded that He is the only One worthy to give His servant the rest of the message.

- 5) The angel's posture is that of a conqueror taking possession of his territory. He's claiming the whole world (see **Josh. 1:1-3**). Of course, only the victorious Savior could make such a claim. The Antichrist will soon complete his conquest and force the whole world to submit to his control. But before that happens, the Savior will claim the world for Himself, the inheritance that His Father promised Him (**Ps. 2:6-9**). Satan roars like a lion to frighten his prey (**1 Peter 5:8**), but the Lion of Judah roars to announce victory (see **Ps. 95:3-5; Isa. 40:12-17**).

We are not told why John was forbidden to write what the seven thunders uttered, the only "sealed" thing in an otherwise "unsealed" book. God's voice is often compared to thunder. It is useless for us to speculate when God chooses to veil His truth (**Deut. 29:29**).

- b. **The declaration of the angel (vv. 5-11).** This declaration fills us with awe, not only because of what the angel declares, but also because of the way he declares it. It is a solemn scene, with his hand lifted to heaven as though he were under oath.

But if this angel is our Lord Jesus Christ, why would He take an oath? In order to affirm the solemnity and certainty of the words spoken. God put Himself "under oath" when he made His covenant with Abraham (**Heb. 6:13-20**), and when He declared His Son to be High Priest (**Heb. 7:20-22**). He also took an oath when He promised David that the Christ would come from his family (**Acts 2:29-30**).

- 1) The emphasis in **Revelation 10:6** is on God the Creator. Various judgments have already been felt by the heavens, the earth, and the seas, and more judgments are to come. The word that is translated "time" actually means "delay." God has been delaying His judgments so that lost sinners will have time to repent (**2 Peter 3:1-9**); now, however, He will accelerate His judgments and accomplish His purposes.

- 2) Recall that the martyred saints in heaven were concerned about God's seeming delay in avenging their death. "How long, O Lord, how long?" has been the cry of God's suffering people from age to age. God's seeming delay in fulfilling His promises has given the scoffers opportunity to deny God's Word and question His sincerity (see **2 Peter 3**). God's Word is true

and His timing is perfect. This means comfort to the saints—but judgment to sinners.

- 3) In the Bible, a *mystery* is a “sacred secret,” a truth hidden to those outside but revealed to God’s people by His Word (**Matt. 13:10-12**). The “mystery of God” has to do with the age-old problem of evil in the world. Why is there both moral and natural evil in the world? Why doesn’t God do something about it? Of course, the Christian knows that God did “do something about it” at Calvary when Jesus Christ was made sin and experienced divine wrath for a sinful world. Since God has already paid the price for sin, He is free to delay His judgment, and He cannot be accused of injustice or unconcern.
- 4) The signal for this mystery’s completion is the sounding of the seventh trumpet (**Rev. 11:14-19**). The last half of the tribulation begins when the angels start to pour out the bowls, in which “is filled up [completed] the wrath of God” (**Rev. 15:1**).
- 5) The *directions* that the angel gave to John (**Rev. 10:8-11**) should remind us of our responsibility to assimilate the Word of God and make it a part of the inner man. It was not enough for John to see the book or even know its contents and purpose. He had to receive it into his inner being.
- 6) God’s Word is compared to food: bread (**Matt. 4:4**), milk (**1 Peter 2:20**), meat (**1 Cor. 3:1-2**), and honey (**Ps. 119:103**). The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel knew what it was to “eat the Word before they could share it with others.
- 7) The Word must always “become flesh” (**John 1:14**) before it can be given to those who need it. Woe unto that preacher or teacher who merely echoes God’s Word and does not incarnate it, making it a living part of his very being.

God will not thrust His Word into our mouths and force us to receive it. He hands it to us and we must take it. Nor can He change the effects the Word will have in our lives: There will be both sorrow and joy, bitterness and sweetness. God’s Word contains sweet promises and assurances but it also contains bitter warnings and prophecies of judgments.

The Christians bears witness of both life and death (**2 Cor. 2:14-17**). The faithful minister will declare all of God’s counsel (**Acts 20:27**). He will not dilute the message of God simply to please his listeners (**2 Tim. 4:1-5**).

The angel commissioned John to prophesy again; his work was not yet completed. He must declare God’s prophetic truth concerning (not “before”) many people, and nations, and tongues,

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and kings (**Rev. 5:9**). The word nations usually refers to the Gentile nations. John will have much to say about the nations of the world as he presents the rest of this prophecy.

2. The Testimony Of The Two Witnesses (11:1-14)

a. **The ministry of the witnesses (vv. 1-6).** The place is Jerusalem and the time is the first half of the tribulation. Israel is worshipping again at its restored temple, built under the protection of the Antichrist, whose true character has not yet been revealed. To spiritualize **Revelation 11:1-2** and make the temple refer to the church creates a number of serious problems:

- 1) For one thing, how could John measure an invisible body of people, even if the church were still on earth?
- 2) If the temple is the church, then who are the worshippers and what is the altar?
- 3) And since the church unites Jews and Gentiles in one body (**Eph. 2:11ff.**), why are the Gentiles segregated in this temple?
- 4) It seems wisest to interpret this temple as an actual building in the Holy City of Jerusalem (**Neh. 11:1, 18; Dan. 9:24**).

John's measurement of the temple is a symbolic action. To measure something means to claim it for yourself. The Lord was saying through John, "I own this city and this temple, and I claim both for Myself."

What John did was especially significant because the Gentiles had taken over Jerusalem. The Antichrist had broken his agreement with Israel, and now he was about to use the temple for his own diabolical purposes (**2 Thes. 2:3-4**). All of this will be elaborated on it **Revelation 13**. Note that the two witnesses minister during the first half of the tribulation (**Rev. 11:3**; 1,260 days). Jerusalem is then overrun by the Gentiles for forty-two months, the last half of the tribulation.

- 1) Their witness is related to Israel and the temple. How tragic that the power of God and the Word of God will be outside the temple and not within as in former ages. Like the temple that Jesus left, this new house will be desolate (see **Matt. 23:38**).
- 2) Not only do these witnesses declare God's words, but they also do God's work and perform miracles of judgment, reminding us both of Moses and Elijah. Some students cite **Malachi 4:5-6** as evidence that one of the witnesses may be Elijah, but Jesus applied that prophecy to John the Baptist (**Matt. 17:10-13**). John the Baptist, however denied that he was Elijah returned to earth.

Instead of relating the ministry of the witnesses to Moses and Elijah, the angel who spoke to John connected their ministry with Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest (**Zech. 4**). These two

men helped to reestablish Israel in Palestine and to rebuild the temple. It was a discouraging task, and the Gentiles made it even more difficult, but God provided the special power they needed to get the work done. This truth is an encouragement to God's servants in all ages, for the work of the Lord is never easy.

b. The martyrdom of the witnesses (vv. 7-10). This comes only when they have finished their testimony. God's obedient servants are immortal until their work is done. "The beast" (the Antichrist) is now in power and wants to take over the temple, but he cannot succeed until the two witnesses are out of the way. God will permit him to slay them, for no one will be able to make war against "the beast" and win (**Rev. 13:4**).

- 1) The witnesses will not even be permitted decent burial (see **Ps. 79:1-3**). But even this indecency will be used by God to bear witnesses to mankind. The earth-dwellers will rejoice at their enemies' removal and will celebrate a "satanic Christmas" by sending gifts to one another.
- 2) These two prophets will definitely have a relationship with Israel, and the world, for the most part, had not approved of the nation Israel. In the middle of the tribulation, "the beast" will turn against Israel and begin to persecute the Jews.

c. The resurrection of the witnesses (vv. 11-14). Miraculously, the two witnesses are not only raised from the dead, but also caught up into heaven! God rescues them from their enemies and gives a solemn witness to the watching world. The world's great joy suddenly becomes great fear.

Are we to interpret the three-and-a-half days literally? Or does the phrase simply mean "after a short time"? It seems too specific to mean that. Does it symbolize a longer period, say three-and-a-half years? It is not likely that two dead bodies would be kept lying in a city street for more than three years. Perhaps this is a picture of a rapture of all the saints in the midst of the tribulation, and the three-and-a-half years covers the first half of the period. These days appear to be literal days, just as the forty-two months in **Revelation 11:2** are literal months. The Bible does not explain why this length of time was chosen and it is useless for us to speculate.

Our Lord's friends watched Him ascend to heaven (**Acts 1:9-12**), but the witnesses' enemies will see them resurrected and will be shaken with fear. Their fear will increase when a great earthquake occurs, killing 7,000 men and destroying a tenth part of Jerusalem. A great earthquake occurred when the sixth seal was opened (**Rev. 6:12**), and there will be a greater one when the seventh vial is poured out (**Rev. 16:18-20**).

3. The testimony Of The Elders (11:15-19)

We have been waiting since **Revelation 8:13** for this third "woe" to arrive and now it is here. When the seventh angel blew the trumpet, three dramatic events occurred.

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a. **An announcement of victory (v. 15).** These “great voices” were probably the choirs of heaven. The great announcement is that the kingdom (John uses the singular because “the beast” now has the world under his control) of this world belongs to Jesus Christ. Of course, Christ does not claim His royal rights until He returns, but the victory has already been won. Satan offered Him the world’s kingdoms, but he refused the offer (**Matt. 4:8-9**). Instead, He died on the cross, arose, and returned victoriously to heaven, and here the Father gave Him His inheritance (**Ps. 2:4-9**).

- 1) However, we must not incorrectly assume that our Lord is not reigning today, because He is. According to **Hebrews 7:1-2**, Jesus Christ is “King of righteousness” and “King of peace.” He rules over a spiritual kingdom, but in that future day, He will reign over the nations of the world and rule with a rod of iron.
- 2) No matter how difficult the circumstances might be, or how defeated God’s people may think they are, Jesus Christ is still King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and He is in control. One day, we shall triumph!

b. **An acclamation of praise (vv. 16-18).** The elders left their own thrones and prostrated themselves in worship before God’s throne. They gave thanks for three special blessings: that Christ reigns supremely (**Rev. 11:17**), that He judges righteously (**Rev. 11:18**), and that He rewards graciously (**Rev. 11:18**).

- 1) In **Revelation 4:10-11**, the elders praised the Creator; and in **Revelation 5:9-14**, they worshipped the Redeemer. Here the emphasis is on the Conqueror and the King. Keep in mind that in John’s day the church on earth looked as though it were defeated, for Rome was the conqueror and king.
- 2) John was reminding the saints that they were “a kingdom of priests,” reigning with the Savior (**Rev. 1:5-6**). It may seem at times that the throne of heaven is empty, but it is not. Jesus Christ has both power and authority—in fact, all authority (**Matt. 28:18**), where the word power means “authority.”
- 3) Christ not only reigns supremely, but He also judges righteously (**Rev. 11:18**). The Lamb is also the Lion! In **Revelation 11:18**, we have a “table of contents” for the remainder of the book of revelation. These events did not take place the instant the angel blew his trumpet; he simply signaled the beginning of the process, and now these events would take place as planned.

- 4) “The nations were angry.” What do the nations have to be angry about? Certainly, the Lord has been good and gracious to them. He has provided their needs, assigned their territories, and graciously postponed His judgment to give men opportunity to be saved. Even more, He sent His Son to be the savior of the world. Today, God offers forgiveness to the nations! What more could He do for them?
- 5) Then, why are the nations angry? Because they want to have their own way. “Why do the heathen [the nations] rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed [Christ], saying, ‘Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us’” (**Ps. 2:1-3**).
- 6) They want to worship and serve the creature instead of the Creator (**Rom. 1:25**). Like adolescent children, the nations want to cast off all restraint, and God will permit them to do so.
- 7) The result will be another “Babylon” (**Rev. 17-18**), man’s last attempt to build his Utopia, a “heaven on earth.”

Note the change in attitude shown by the nations of the world. In **Revelation 11:2**, the nations ruthlessly take over Jerusalem. In **Revelation 11:9**, they rejoice at the death of the two witnesses. But now they are angry; their arrogance and joy did not last very long. This belligerent attitude will finally cause the nations to unite to fight God at the great battle of Armageddon.

- 1) “And thy wrath is come.” The word translated “angry” in **Revelation 11:18** is the verb form of the word translated “wrath.” But man’s wrath can never equal the wrath of the Lamb (**Rev. 6:16-17**). Even Satan’s wrath, as cruel as it is, is no match for God’s wrath (**Rev. 12:17**).
- 2) There was intense suffering in the first half of the tribulation, but only the last half will reveal the wrath of God. There are two Greek words for anger: *thumos*, which means “rage, passionate anger,” and *orge*, used here, which means “indignation, a settled attitude of wrath.”
- 3) God’s anger is not dispassionate, for He hates sin and loves righteousness and justice, but neither is it temperamental and unpredictable.
- 4) “And the time of the dead, that they should be judged” take us to the very end of God’s prophetic program. In one sense, every day is a “day of the Lord” because God is always judging righteously. God is longsuffering toward lost sinners and none will escape.

There will also be a judgment of God's children, known as "the judgment Seat of Christ." God will reward His faithful servants (**Matt. 25:21**), and the suffering they experienced on earth will be forgotten in the glory of His presence. Though God's children will not be judged for their sins (that judgment took place on the cross), they will be judged for their works and rewarded generously by the Master.

- 1) The judgment seat of Christ will take place in heaven after Christ has called His people home. When He returns to earth to establish His Kingdom, the saints will be ready to reign with Him, with every blemish of the church removed. Today we groan as we serve God, because we know only too well our handicaps and blemishes, but one day, we shall serve Him perfectly.

c. An assurance of God's faithfulness (v. 19). This chapter opened with a temple on earth, but now we see the temple in heaven. The focus of attention is on the ark of God, the symbol of God's presence with His people.

In the Old Testament tabernacle and temple, the ark stood behind the veil, in the Holy of Holies. God's glory rested on the ark, and God's law was within the ark, beautifully illustrating that the two must never be separated. He is the holy God and must deal righteously with sin. But He is also the faithful God who keeps His promises to His people.

This vision of the ark would greatly encourage God's suffering people to whom John sent this book. "God will fulfill His promises!" John was saying to them. "He will reveal His glory! Trust Him!"

Once again John saw and heard the portents of a storm (see **Rev. 4:5, 8:5**). Greater judgment is about to fall on the rebellious people of earth! But God's people need not fear the storms, for He is in control. The ark reminds them of His presence and the faithfulness of His promises. And on that ark was the mercy seat on which the blood was sprinkled each day of Atonement. Even in wrath, God remembers His mercy (**Hab. 3:2**).

The stage is now set for the dramatic appearance of "the beast," Satan's masterpiece, the false Christ who will control the world.

Homework: The Terrible Trio. Read Revelation 12—13.