

A Prophet, Two Witnesses, and a Trumpet: Revelation 10-11

Covenant Church
Sunday, June 2, 2019
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Revelation 10:1 – 11:19 (NRSV)

^{10:1} And I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. ² He held a little scroll open in his hand. Setting his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, ³ he gave a great shout, like a lion roaring. And when he shouted, the seven thunders sounded. ⁴ And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down.” ⁵ Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and the land raised his right hand to heaven ⁶ and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it: “There will be no more delay, ⁷ but in the days when the seventh angel is to blow his trumpet, the mystery of God will be fulfilled, as he announced to his servants the prophets.”

⁸ Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, “Go, take the scroll that is 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 told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, “Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth.” ¹⁰ So I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.

¹¹ Then they said to me, “You must prophesy again about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.”

^{11:1} Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, “Come and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, ² but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample over the holy city for forty-two months. ³ And I will grant my two witnesses authority to prophesy for one thousand two hundred sixty days, wearing sackcloth.”

⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. ⁵ And if anyone wants to harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes; anyone who wants to harm them must be killed in this manner. ⁶ They have authority to shut the sky, so that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have authority over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire.

⁷ When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, ⁸ and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that is prophetically called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. ⁹ For three and a half days members of the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb; ¹⁰ and the inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and celebrate and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to the inhabitants of the earth.

¹¹ But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and those who saw them were terrified. 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 watched them. ¹³ At that moment there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

¹⁴ The second woe has passed. The third woe is coming very soon.

¹⁵ Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying,

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord
and of his Messiah,
and he will reign forever and ever.”

¹⁶ Then the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, ¹⁷ singing,

“We give you thanks, Lord God Almighty,
who are and who were,
for you have taken your great power
and begun to reign.

¹⁸ The nations raged,
but your wrath has come,
and the time for judging the dead,
for rewarding your servants, the prophets
and saints and all who fear your name,
both small and great,
and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”

¹⁹ Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

A Prophet...

“This suggests that there are dimensions of reality that mortals are not able to comprehend.”¹ —Bruce Metzger

“We know that we are presented with the complete meaning of the divine life as it is directed to us, and we know that we are required to announce that meaning in our conversations. But we know also that we cannot tell it all. Our minds boggle at its immensity. Our own lives by their smallness betray its largeness. Our vocabulary cannot begin to cover the ground. But we are not therefore speechless... the opened book is that which we are presented, the little book is what we manage to get hold of and assimilate. However much we say, we say only part of it.” —Eugene Peterson²

¹ Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 67.

² Peterson, *Reverse Thunder*, 108-09.

But you, mortal, hear what I say to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; *open your mouth and eat what I give you*. I looked, and a hand was stretched out to me, and *a written scroll was in it*. He spread it before me; it had writing on the front and on the back, and written on it were *words of lamentation and mourning and woe*. He said to me, *O mortal, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. He said to me, Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey*. (Ezek 2:8 – 3:3).

Two Witnesses...

“[C]hapter 11 has been generally acknowledged to be one of the most perplexing sections of the entire book.”³

1. The story of the Two Witnesses is a “a remarkable brief parable of the life of the church” (Joseph Mangina).

Symbol	Intertexts	Meaning?
Measuring the temple (11:1) but not the court outside (11:2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16a; Eph 2:21 We are God’s temple • Ezek 40-48 • Zech 2:1-2 	<p>“Build[ing] and repair[ing]” or “protect[ing] and preserv[ing]” or “sanctifying” and “resanctifying” God’s people.⁴</p> <p>“Nations” (i.e., spiritual “Gentiles”) will oppress the church</p>
“Forty-two months” (11:2) = “one thousand two hundred sixty days” (11:3) = three-and-a-half years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dan 7:25; 9:27; 12:7 	<p>“the traditional apocalyptic term of Gentile domination,”⁵ “a limited time,”⁶ “a ‘broken seven,’ denoting the radical imperfection that marks the present evil age.”⁷</p>
“the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth” (11:4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zech 4:1-14 the symbolism of the two olive trees • Deut 19:15 the requirement that there be two witnesses for valid testimony 	<p>2 olive trees = Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor of Judea, who are “two Messiahs, kingly and priestly”⁸</p> <p>2 lampstands = the church</p>
“fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes” (11:5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Kgs 1:10, 12 Twice Elijah calls down fire from heaven to consume fifty men sent from King Ahaziah of Samaria • 1 Kgs 18:20-40 Elijah defeats the 450 prophets of Baal by calling down fire from heaven to consume a wet burnt offering 	Elijah
“authority to shut the sky so that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying” (11:6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jas 5:17 “Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth” (see 1 Kgs 17-18) 	Elijah

³ Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 68.

⁴ The phrases are from Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 69; Talbert, *The Apocalypse*, 44; and Mangina, *Revelation*, loc. 2651.

⁵ Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 69.

⁶ Talbert, *The Apocalypse*, 45.

⁷ Mangina, *Revelation*, loc. 2664.

⁸ Talbert, *The Apocalypse*, 45.

“authority over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire” (11:6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exod 7:17, 19 	Moses
beast from the bottomless pit that kills the witnesses (11:7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rev ch. 13, 17 	Evil
“the great city that is prophetically called Sodom and Egypt” (11:8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gen 19:4-11 • Exod 7 – 12 	“Sodom symbolizes moral degradation... and Egypt stands for oppression and slavery.” ⁹

2. The purpose/aim here is *repentance*
3. What do we learn about witness here?
 - a. Sackcloth means that they talk about sin, including, perhaps, especially, their *own*
 - b. Not dissuaded by ineffectiveness and opposition

“Difficult or not, it must be done. Successful or not, it must be done. God wills that his redemptive activity in history and among persons be known.” —Eugene Peterson¹⁰

- c. Fruit borne only by/after their death—primarily by their actions?

“[J]ust as Christ’s mission of proclaiming God’s kingdom led to his violent death at the hands of his enemies, so the church’s mission cannot but be greeted by a similar fate. All this is the normal fate that can be expected by prophets. No wonder the scroll, so sweet to the taste, turns bitter as soon as it reaches John’s stomach!” —Joseph Mangina¹¹

- d. Corporate witness more than individual witness

And A Trumpet...

1. Repentance, not judgment, is the ultimate point.

“But while God’s ‘no’ to human sin is utterly serious, it was never the point. God’s ‘no’ stands in the service of his ‘yes.’” —Joseph Mangina¹²

2. It’s about the presence of God—presence/ worship *is* the reward

“The issue of all the judgments, the essence of all the rewards, is to have a more perfect access to God and a clearer vision of his splendor.” —Bruce Metzger¹³

⁹ Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 70.

¹⁰ Peterson, *Reverse Thunder*, 110.

¹¹ Mangina, *Revelation*, loc. 2746.

¹² Mangina, *Revelation*, loc. 2591.

¹³ Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 71.