

Create a Learning Site

Go deeper in your understanding of the Bible

www.wilrens.org



Revelation Text: Chapter 10-11 (Two Witnesses)

[This is one of twelve units taking a closer look at the text of Revelation, section by section. If you like this material:](#)

- Pass it on to a friend.
- Visit Create a Learning Site at www.wilrens.org and sign up for free monthly updates_(<http://eepurl.com/Q5vb1>). Join me on my journey of discovery!
- Make a donation to support our ministry. Go to <https://www.wilrens.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Donations-Create-a-Learning-Site.pdf> for information.

You are free to pass this PDF on to others, but please don't change any of its content when you do.

Copyright: CC BY-ND 4.0. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

Version: December 2022.

Create a Learning Site (<https://www.wilrens.org>) is a monthly training letter and blog in the field of biblical studies and teaching.

Prologue	In the Spirit	In the Spirit				In the Spirit		In the Spirit	Epilogue
	Letters	Seals	Trumpets	Signs	Bowls	Babylon	Judgment	Jerusalem	
Setting									
Scene 1									
Scene 2									
Scene 3									
Scene 4									
Scene 5									
Scene 6									
Church Interlude									
Scene 7									

In this unit, I look at the interlude in chapters 10 and 11.

Where are we in the text? In between scene number six and number seven in the series of seven trumpets. For the second time in this book, we have a relatively long interruption. It takes all of chapter 10 and most of chapter 11.

This is not working!
(9:20f)



This interruption or interlude comes at a point in the book at which it has become clear that the various plagues are not leading to repentance. God's agenda of redemption with its overall purpose of an innumerable multitude of redeemed people is not moving forward.

Cloud
Rainbow
Face like sun
Pillars of fire
Voice like lion



At the beginning of chapter 10, John sees a mighty angel coming down with a little book. His description is exceptional; it includes the following elements:

Cloud

Rainbow

Face like the sun

Legs like pillars of fire

Voice like a lion

This is exceptional because earlier in the book, all these elements are associated with God or with Christ. This is a special angel indeed.

William Blake, Angel of the Revelation (Book of Revelation, chapter 10), [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Angel_of_the_Revelation_\(Book_of_Revelation,_chapter_10\)_MET_DT5424.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Angel_of_the_Revelation_(Book_of_Revelation,_chapter_10)_MET_DT5424.jpg), Public Domain



In 10:3 and 4, seven thunders sound, but when John wants to write down what they said, he is told to seal it and not write it down. To seal something means it is not or not yet to be known or understood. In contrast to this, in 22:10, John is told: "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book." This is highly significant; it means the content of Revelation is meant to be understood. Only the seven thunders are sealed up; the rest of the book is not.

<https://pixabay.com/en/seal-sealing-wax-certificate-old-1463911/>, CC0



So what did the seven thunders say? Are you curious? I am. But let's face it: the answer is, we don't know. The only guess we may venture is that this represents another series of judgements or plagues in between the trumpets and the bowls. If this is correct, their sealing may also be an indication that God is not going to push harder by means of plagues, that he is going to cut short on judgement, because it does not serve his ultimate purpose.

<https://pixabay.com/en/lightning-storm-arizona-monsoon-1158027/>, CC0



The angel John sees has one foot on the sea and one foot on the land (10:2, 5). This indicates that God has full authority over both realms. Later, in chapter 13, two beasts will emerge, one from the sea and one from the land. Here, we get a hint that God is in full control over both of these.

William Blake, Angel of the Revelation (Book of Revelation, chapter 10), [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Angel_of_the_Revelation_\(Book_of_Revelation,_chapter_10\)_MET_DT5424.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Angel_of_the_Revelation_(Book_of_Revelation,_chapter_10)_MET_DT5424.jpg), Public Domain

[T]hat there would be no more delay, but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets. (Rev. 10:6f, ESV)

The mighty angel swears a solemn oath, with this content:

[T]hat there would be no more delay, but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets. (Rev. 10:6f, ESV)

This is important to keep in mind: when the seventh trumpet is blown, everything will be completed; that will be the end.



In the final paragraph of chapter 10, John is told to eat the little book that the angel is holding. It is both sweet as honey and bitter to his stomach. The experience is similar to one the prophet Ezekiel had, in chapter 3 of his book. Likely, the little book contains the prophetic words we get in the second half of Revelation. This is why the final verse reads:

<https://pixabay.com/en/honey-sweet-syrup-organic-golden-1006972/>, CC0

4

And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings." (Rev. 10:11)

To be able to do this, John is "eating" the words that he is to prophesy. He is being recommissioned; this is preparing him for another round of prophecy. Just like any prophet before him, John must internalise the word of God, so that he can pass it on. It needs to be part of him. The Word also needs to be part of us, deeply internalised, if we want to pass it on to others.

So new revelation is coming. And hopefully, it will provide us with a solution to the problem of how the nations will repent: a strategy to fulfil God's purpose.

As an aside, we have now seen such a fourfold phrase several times; there are seven in total. It brings out the idea of totality: truly every ethnic group in the whole wide world is included in this reference. This is why the phrase is fourfold: remember, four is the number of the earth.

5:9, 7:9, 10:11, 11:9, 13:7, 14:6, 17:15

Literal?



In chapter 11, John is told to measure the temple. This, too, has a parallel in the book of Ezekiel. Starting in Ezekiel 40, the prophet describes an extensive vision of a temple that he had to measure in detail.

The big question in Revelation is: are we to take this literally? In that case, for this to happen, the Jews would have to rebuild the earthly temple. This is, of course, what many end-time books believe. However, following the book of Hebrews (not to mention the rest of the NT), there isn't any need for such a temple anymore.

Juan R. Cuadra (1998), Close up of the temple in the Holyland Model of Jerusalem, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jerus-n4i.jpg>, CC0



More likely, this temple is to be taken as an image of the church. Notice that only the inner building, the actual sanctuary, is measured. This means it is set apart and protected. The courtyard around it is not measured, it is not protected and therefore trampled.

What does this mean? Probably, the courtyard stands for the outward form of the church, the church as an organization, with structures and buildings and so forth. This is something that can be destroyed. But the true, inner reality of the church, the invisible church, its essential nature, the church as God's people and Christ's body in the world, cannot be overcome.

Measuring, therefore, is similar in meaning to the sealing that took place in chapter 7. It means to place under protection.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Saint_Andrew_Orthodox_Christian_Church.jpg,
CC0

1260 days = 42 months = 3 ½ years

A time limit is set for the trampling, and it is a duration of time we find repeated in the book, even if in different words.

1260 days = 42 months = 3 ½ years (*a time, and times, and half a time* is usually understood in this way).

These numbers are similar to the ones in the book of Daniel. There, they refer to events in Israel that began around the year 168 BC. A pagan king with the name of Antiochus Epiphany ruled over a kingdom that included the land of Israel. He wanted to enforce Greek religion among the Jews and therefore forbade sabbath keeping and circumcision. He set up an altar in the temple in Jerusalem dedicated to the Greek God Zeus and sacrificed a pig on it, an animal that was unclean to the Jews and horrifyingly unsuitable to be used as a sacrifice. This defiled the temple, something that lasted for approximately 3 ½ years. It marked a time of severe persecution for the Jews, as predicted in the book of Daniel. The Jews rose in rebellion and eventually were able to reconquer and cleanse the temple.

The meaning of this duration here is symbolic. It does not tell us how long this will be, and it is something that can happen more than once. As a symbol, it stands for a time

of intense persecution, similar to the one the Jews experienced under Antiochus
Epiphany.

Literal?



Witness by Nick Youngson, <http://www.thebluediamondgallery.com/typewriter/w/witness.html>, CC BY-SA 3.0 ImageCreator

Interestingly, this time of persecution is also the time the two witnesses prophesy in verse 3. Who are they?

Some people take this literally and then it may refer to two individuals who will one day operate in the earthly city of Jerusalem and perform some remarkable miracles. But if this is what it means, it seems quite irrelevant. Why would we need to know this? Why would all the generations of Christians before us have had to know this, seeing they died long before any of it happened?

I will take a close look at the text and propose a very different way of understanding this passage.

Witness by [Nick Youngson](http://www.thebluediamondgallery.com/typewriter/w/witness.html),

<http://www.thebluediamondgallery.com/typewriter/w/witness.html>, [CC BY-SA 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)
[ImageCreator](https://www.imcreator.com/)

These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands, → Zech. 4
that stand before the Lord of the earth.

And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed.

They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying,

and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood

and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire.

(Rev. 11:4-6, ESV)

Revelation 11:4: “These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.” This image is taken from Zechariah 4. In Zechariah, there are two olive trees and only one lampstand.



This one lampstand in Zechariah 4 represents Israel; the two olive trees are Joshua, the high priest, and Zerubbabel, the governor, a descendant of David. They represent the priestly and kingly office in Israel. Remember that in the NT, all God's people are a royal priesthood – a first indication we should understand this as a representation of the church.

We are looking at an image of the church as a witness. A further indication for this: already in chapter 1 we learned that the seven lampstands are the seven churches. Lampstands in the book of Revelation represent churches.

Why are there two witnesses (and not seven)? Probably because according to the law it takes two witnesses to establish something as true in a court of law.

<https://pixabay.com/en/menorah-candles-light-burning-318641/>, CC0

These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands, → Zech. 4
that stand before the Lord of the earth.

And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. → Elijah
2Ki. 1:10

They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, → Elijah
1Ki. 17:10

and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood → Moses
Ex. 7:14ff

and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire. → Exodus

(Rev. 11:4-6, ESV)

Back to the text: “And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed.” This reminds us of Elijah, who called forth fire from heaven in 2 Kings 10:1.

“They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying.” This reminds us of Elijah in 1 Kings 17:1.

“And they have power over the waters to turn them into blood.” This reminds us of Moses in Egypt.

“...and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire.” As in the book of Exodus.

How does this apply to the church? If the two witnesses or lampstands are indeed the church, this passage gives us an understanding of the church in its prophetic role in the world.

At this point, it may be countered that the church does not look anything like this. Not today and not in the days of the Roman Empire either. But that is precisely the point. Remember the fragment from the book of Esther that I presented in the

introduction. Apocalyptic literature presents relatively ordinary events in extraordinary ways so that we can grasp their significance. And it shows us that things can be quite different from what they appear to be. On the surface, the church was a tiny minority without power, opposed by what appeared to be an overwhelmingly superior empire. Spiritually, things look entirely different. The church is not marginal but at the centre of what happens in the world.

And in spite of persecution, the church will fulfil its prophetic mission and witness.

Moses and Elijah?

Notice that the text does not identify the two witnesses as Moses and Elijah. Their names are not mentioned. The point is that they do similar things to Moses and Elijah – who stand for the law and the prophets, and who both represented God as prophets, Moses confronting Pharaoh, the great oppressor of God’s people in the OT, and Elijah confronting Ahab and Jezebel, the queen who promoted Baal worship in Israel.

When God looks at the church (and you and me), he sees a Moses-and-Elijah people, chosen and anointed to confront and overcome the kingdoms of this world. Indeed, things are not what they appear to be. (It is not what you see when you look in the mirror, I know.)

And when they have finished their testimony, the beast[?] that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them.

(Rev. 11:7-12, ESV)

where?
how long?
christmas?
Purim!
like
Jesus

Now comes a long passage (Rev. 11:7-12, ESV); please bear with me.

"And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit [this is the first time that the beast is mentioned; we don't know anything about it yet, except for its origin: the bottomless pit]

[The beast] will make war on them and conquer them [it appears the church is defeated]

and kill them, and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified [notice where this takes place; people often assume Jerusalem, based on the fact that this is where Jesus was crucified; but everywhere else in the book of Revelation, the great city is Babylon, not Jerusalem; Sodom is the place of moral depravity; Egypt is the place of oppression; these are strange and unfitting names for Jerusalem; and the fact is, the ultimate responsibility for the execution of Jesus lay with the Roman authorities; it would therefore not be too far-fetched to make the place of crucifixion refer to Rome and the Roman empire rather than to Jerusalem].

For three and a half days [this is not a long time; it is an obvious contrast to the 3 ½ years, 1260 days; the witnesses are free to witness and prophesy for 3 ½ years; their ministry is curtailed for only 3 ½ days]

For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations [that phrase again]

will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents [this is a bit like a Christmas celebration, except that Christmas did not exist yet; instead, it is a perverted Purim feast; at Purim, the Jews remember that God had saved them from extermination, and they give each other presents],

because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, ‘Come up here!’ And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them.”

In some ways, the experience of the two witnesses mirrors that of Christ: several years of ministry, killed, resurrected, and ascended into heaven.

And now comes the great surprise in this passage.

And at that hour 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.

(Rev. 11:13, ESV)

1Ki. 19:18

Is. 6:13
Am. 5:3

“And at that hour 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” (Rev. 11:13, ESV).

This sounds like a minor catastrophe, after all the plagues we have already witnessed in the book. Only one-tenth? Only 7000? As usual, the background is in the Old Testament. Both Isaiah and Amos predict that at the most a tenth of the nation will survive. When Elijah meets God on Mount Horeb, he is told that there is a faithful remnant of 7000 in Israel who have not bent their knee to Baal.

Here, it is the opposite. There is not a faithful remnant or minority but a remnant of those to be judged: one-tenth, 7000. Things are finally moving forward. Notice how the passage ends: people give glory to God.

What the plagues and judgements were unable to do, is accomplished by the faithful witness and martyrdom of God’s people. This gives us insight into God’s newly revealed strategy. This is how God’s plan will succeed. It is the suffering church that will persuade the world.

The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.

(Rev. 11:14, ESV)

With the next verse, John takes us back to the main flow of the vision:

“The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come” (Rev. 11:14, ESV).

Remember the eagle in 8:13, who announced a threefold “woe,” pointing to the three remaining trumpets. 11:14 tells us that the last and remaining woe, the seventh trumpet, is about to come.

And as the mighty angel in chapter 10 had sworn, and as shown in the previous recording on the seven trumpets, with the seventh trumpet everything is over; the entire prophetic programme will have been completed.

And yet, we are only halfway through the book. Obviously, this book is not chronological. In the next chapter, John will take us all the way back to the beginning of the gospel, to something that was already past even for him: the birth of Christ.

To be continued.

Credits

William Blake, Angel of the Revelation (Book of Revelation, chapter 10),
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Angel_of_the_Revelation_\(Book_of_Revelation,_chapter_10\)_MET_DT5424.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Angel_of_the_Revelation_(Book_of_Revelation,_chapter_10)_MET_DT5424.jpg), Public Domain

Seal: <https://pixabay.com/en/seal-sealing-wax-certificate-old-1463911/>, CCo

Lightning: <https://pixabay.com/en/lightning-storm-arizona-monsoon-1158027/>, CCo

Honey: <https://pixabay.com/en/honey-sweet-syrup-organic-golden-1006972/>, CCo

Temple: Juan R. Cuadra (1998), Close up of the temple in the Holyland Model of Jerusalem,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jerus-n4i.jpg>, CCo

Church: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Saint_Andrew_Orthodox_Christian_Church.jpg, CCo

Witness: Nick Youngson, <http://www.thebluediamondgallery.com/typewriter/w/witness.html>, CC BY-SA 3.0 ImageCreator

Lampstand: <https://pixabay.com/en/menorah-candles-light-burning-318641/>, CCo

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version, 2016 (Wheaton, IL: Standard Bible Society)

Create a Learning Site

Go deeper in your understanding of the Bible

www.wilrens.org



Revelation Text: Chapter 10-11 (Two Witnesses)

This is one of twelve units taking a closer look at the text of Revelation, section by section. You are free to pass this PDF on to others, but please don't change any of its content when you do.

Copyright: CC BY-ND 4.0. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

Version: December 2022.