



Revelation 10 & 11

The Apostle John first wrote Revelation to the seven house-churches of western Asia Minor (Turkey). There was a world of uncertainty. Following Jesus would be life threatening in the coming century. John portrays this difficulty for them and us with images of judgment akin to the plagues against Egypt in the book of Exodus. The “seal judgments” and the “trumpet judgments” describe what’s been going on in the world since the time of Christ’s ascension until the Second Coming. “The seals, trumpets, and bowls describe the same reality with some variation.” (Witherington) With each cycle of judgment, the scene intensifies like a laboring mother. “Demonic locusts” and “demonic horsemen” turn on their own worshipers—isn’t that like Satan? In the wake of these judgments, are believers simply to ride out the storm? Does God want us to embrace a foxhole mentality, hunkering down and patiently waiting for the new heavens and the new earth? Absolutely not! These punishments are being poured out because God’s people have been praying! “God, do something!” (Revelation 8:4)

The Big Angel and the Little Scroll

John sees another mighty angel descend from heaven. With a lion like voice, the angel has an appearance that unmistakably identifies him as a messenger of Christ himself. Notice in 10:4 that there is another cycle of punishments called the “thunder judgments” that are kept sealed. This is the only part of the prophesy that John is not allowed to record. *The idea is that an entire cycle of judgments are omitted because they won’t do any good.* Some people just won’t repent because they are just too loyal to Satan. So then, the angel roars in vv. 6-7 that “a predetermined time in the future has been set when God’s purposes for history are completed. When that time comes, God ‘with no more delay’ will usher in the new heavens and new earth.” When God says, “Show’s over!” it’s over. And then the new heavens and new earth will commence. Parents sometimes employ counting to make their kids behave. “One, two, threeeee . . . foouuur!” God’s counting is simpler: “One! Okay, that’s it!”

The angel did not show up to rescue John or us! The angel came to give us an assignment! Preach! Share the Gospel! Tell others what the Lord has done in and through your life! The bitter-sweet scroll is a play off of Ezekiel’s call to ministry in Ezekiel 2 & 3. As Ezekiel was to ingest God’s Word to share it with his country, Israel; John is to ingest God’s Word to share with all the nations. It is a bitter-sweet scroll in that it is personally sweet and nourishing to take in. It is painfully bitter because of those who will reject God’s Word. They don’t want to hear it and they hate those who share it. Jesus said, *“If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”* (John 15:20 NIV)

One other point: that the mighty angel has one fiery leg on the land and the other on the sea is a significant image of total sovereignty. This is important to know ahead of time, especially when we read later on of a beast coming out of the land and a beast coming out of the sea. Nothing comes out of the land or the sea that isn’t under the authority of Jesus Christ! Jesus’ kingship is uncontested.

Numbers: 1 Temple, 2 Witnesses, 42 Months, 1260 days, 3 ½ days, 1/10, & 7000

This should be pretty easy to figure out! ☺ Actually, one scholar called chapter 11 the most difficult and disputed in Revelation. From my research (scholars like Beale, Osborne, Bauckham, Carson), I'm convinced that these are figurative numbers and images which convey a real situation. Note: figurative doesn't mean unreal. These images are OT saturated! Let's unpack them

The Temple = the redeemed people of God, that is, the church in existence since the ascension of Christ until His Second Coming. The inner court represents those Christians who are not persecuted and the outer court represents that part of the church which is persecuted ("trampled on"). That John measures the temple means "that even before creation, God made a decree that secured the salvation of all people who would become genuine members of the church" (Beale 1999, 560).

42 months, 1260 days, 3 ½ years/days = these numbers all symbolize the period of tribulation, trials, struggles, and persecutions for believers between the time of Christ's ascension and the time of Christ's Second Coming. I'm saying that these numbers symbolize the same thing. These numbers show up in Daniel 7:25 as "time, times and half a time" in prophecy about the 3 ½ year villainous persecution of the Jewish people by the Syrian leader Antiochus Epiphanes. He outlawed Judaism and went so far as to sacrifice pigs on the altar of the Temple from 167-164 BC. Daniel called this "the abomination that causes desolation." He was overthrown by the Hebrew patriot, Judas Maccabeus. Thus these numbers represent *a limited but intense period of persecution that exists from the time of Christ's ascension to the time of His Second Coming*. John uses these Hebrew rich metaphors to describe how the church will be persecuted.

v. 8—The great city, figuratively called Sodom & Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified = Osborne defines the "great city as every city that sets itself up against God; that embodies self-sufficiency in place of dependence; achievement in place of repentance; oppression in place of faith; murder in place of faith; the beast in place of the Lamb." This mindset would include cities like Jerusalem, Rome, Sodom, and the nation of Egypt in Exodus.

Two witnesses, two olive trees, two lamp stands = all refer to the evangelizing and "gospelizing" of the church. Two is the number that Deuteronomy 19:15 has established as the minimum requirement for a valid legal testimony. "The image of olive trees and lamp stands come from Zechariah 4:14; they represent God's presence or His Spirit which was to empower Israel to finish rebuilding the temple in spite of resistance (Zechariah 4:6-9). The main point of Zechariah 4 is divine assurance that opposition will be overcome and the temple completed." (Beale 1999, 577)

1/10 of the city or 7000 who fell = These numbers represent the same thing—the totality of unbelievers judged at the conclusion of history. In John's day 70,000 would have been typical of the size of a city, even Jerusalem; so to see 1/10 of a city fall would have been cataclysmic. (Osborne) These unbelievers will one day give forced homage to God and the Lamb fulfilling Paul's hymn in Philippians 2:5-10.

The Bottom Line

They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. (Revelation 12:11 NIV) God has called us to draw power from His Spirit in our drive against the world. We may be harmed physically but we cannot be harmed spiritually. As a result of our witness, we may receive beastly attacks but ultimately through Christ—the slain Lamb standing—we are spiritually protected from bodily persecution. (Beale) Question: How much do you love your life?