

Lesson 20 - "A Time for Testimonies"

Revelation 10:1-11:19

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We've been learning about marvelous visions God gave the Apostle John who was commanded to write what he saw and heard. In doing so, John was revealing God's great, unmatched power and the culmination of His plan since history began. Although quite sobering, I've been looking forward to sharing more awe-inspiring events in Revelation, chapters 10 and 11.

Leaving chapter 9, the world situation looks grim. We learned from Dan's lecture last week, there appears to be a world-wide war, a world-wide famine, billions of people are killed, and plagues are dispersed on earth like those that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

In today's passages, we're given a chance to catch our breath as God directs a pause, or an interlude, in Tribulation events. David Reagan calls this, "the rhythm" of the book of Revelation. "The action builds — the terror mounts — it gets worse and worse, and then all of a sudden, it comes to a halt, and a parenthetical passage is inserted to assure us that everything is going to work out all right."

During the interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpet judgments, John:

- Measures specific parts of the Third Temple.
- Introduces us to some powerful characters with powerful testimonies.
- Becomes an object lesson that God's Word is bitter-sweet.
- Sees God's temple in heaven.

As Chapter 10 opens, John sees "another mighty angel" and records that the celestial being descends from heaven. Based upon his description, this "mighty" creature seems to have great power and authority. His garments are clouds, a Biblical metaphor for the glory of God, and he has a rainbow over his head, also associated with the glory of God. Perhaps he looked like this because he came from the very presence of God Almighty.

Ray Stedman said never believe how angels are portrayed outside of Scripture. They are not quiet-spoken, effeminate creatures who fly around dreamily plucking on harps. Scripture never portrays them this way. In fact, there's a reason when humans encounter them, they are told "do not fear".

The angel in Revelation 10 is an imposing figure, with legs like pillars of fire and he's able to stride both land and sea. When the being speaks, his voice is commanding like a roaring lion. Some scholars believe he is Jesus Christ, yet others believe the being is an actual angel for these reasons:

- John calls Him "another mighty angel" meaning "another of the same kind" likely referring to the angel in Revelation 5.
- Nowhere in the New Testament is Jesus ever called an angel.
- The angel swore an oath to God implying that God is greater than the angel.
- The angel descends from heaven and stands on earth and there is no evidence that Christ comes to earth midway in the Tribulation.
- John Walvoord said although the angel has splendor and is somewhat similar in appearance to the Son of Man, that doesn't justify identifying him as Christ. For example, the angel in Daniel 10 was another strong angel, but not the Son of God.

Some speculate he is the archangel, Michael. Others think he is the angel Gabriel, whose name means, “mighty one.”

The angel displays a powerful image of a conqueror taking possession of his territory. Holding a little scroll, he decisively plants one foot upon the sea and the other foot upon the earth. In Revelation 13 there are beasts who will come from both the land and the sea. Perhaps God is claiming His sovereignty over both.

The angel shouts like the roar of a lion and seven voices of thunder speak. The Greek word “thunder” often means the voice of the Most High God.

Even though John understands the thunders, he is told not to write what they say. Perhaps the thunders speak of God’s wrath and judgment. The message may be so terrible it must be sealed from our tender brains until God chooses the moment to reveal it.

John MacArthur said, “Any speculation as to the content of their message is pointless. If God wanted it to be known, He would not have forbidden John to write it.”

John doesn’t have time to put away his pen and papyrus because more action is about to take place.

The angel raises his hand to heaven and swears by the Creator Who owns all He created. The angel proclaims there will be no further delay in coming judgments. Although God’s desire is for everyone to repent and not perish, His longsuffering is over and His character demands that He judges.

The angel tells John when the seventh angel blows his trumpet “the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as He announced to His servants the prophets.” (Revelation 10:7) God reveals His mysteries and truths at His appointed time and to His appointed recipients.

From the angel, John is commanded to take and open the little scroll and eat it. John eating a papyrus scroll is an unusual image, but the scroll symbolizes God’s Word.

The prophet Ezekiel was also told to eat a scroll. Ezekiel’s scroll contained a message intended for Israel, but John’s scroll is a message for all nations. Ezekiel was told to prophesy to Israel and not Gentiles, but John is to “prophesy about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings” (Revelation 10:11) As a servant of God, figuratively ingesting God’s Word empowers John to prophesy to the world.

When John first tastes the scroll, it is sweet, but then it sours his stomach. The sweetness and sourness of the scroll may mean it contains both blessings and curses. Sweet words of blessing could be concerning the coming of the Messiah bringing peace. But as Revelation illustrates, there are coming judgments so horrific and devastating, those curses may be what burns in John’s stomach.

John probably could have used some Roloids.

When we absorb God’s Word, it can be sweet and delicious. Sweet as we learn about the Lord and His grace. However, what will happen to those who reject God and endure terrible judgments, should figuratively, or perhaps literally, make us sick to our stomach.

When Chapter 11 opens, John visualizes Jerusalem during the first half of the Tribulation. Israel is worshiping in the Third Temple, which is built with the approval of the Antichrist, whose true character has not yet been revealed. John is told to measure the temple using a measuring rod - a long reed-like plant

that is lightweight and rigid. Along with the temple, John is told to measure the altar and count those that worship there. In Scripture, taking measurements is often a symbol of ownership. It's as if the Lord God is saying, "This is My temple."

John was told not to measure the court outside the temple. The court outside the temple was considered the Court of the Gentiles. In not measuring that outer court, it symbolizes God's interest in the Jewish nation and His rejection of unbelieving nations.

Devout Jews have been planning for decades to build the Third Temple where currently stands a revered site in Islam - the Dome of the Rock. Researchers have discovered that the Second Temple, destroyed in 70 A.D., may actually have stood to the north of the Muslim's Dome of the Rock. If the Third Temple were rebuilt at the original location of the Second Temple, the Dome of the Rock would be in the temple's outer courts. This could explain why the court outside the temple was not to be measured because it will be inhabited by unbelieving Gentiles.

Where the Third Temple will be located hasn't stopped the Jews from creating blueprints for the Temple. For years, items to be used in temple worship are being prepared including everything needed to conduct animal sacrifices. Jewish men are being trained for the priesthood to conduct those sacrifices.

It is inconceivable that the Muslims will allow building of the Third Temple on an Islam site, however, when the Antichrist is in power and gives his approval to do so, the temple will be built. Sadly, the Jews won't realize Antichrist intends to desecrate their temple and set himself up there to be worshipped.

John also records an amazing event involving two powerful preachers whom God uses to warn and testify.

Let's think about what the world will be like at the time of John's vision. When the rapture occurs, Christians will be taken to heaven leaving behind billions of people living in spiritual darkness. Yet, God demonstrates His great mercy and sends these two preachers to proclaim His gospel of repentance and salvation.

They are referred to as the "Two Witnesses", "Two Evangelists", or "Two Prophets." Most scholars believe they will appear 3½ years – the halfway point – into the Tribulation. Their message, their power, and God's destiny for them are dramatic events in the story of the end time.

God allows them to perform supernatural signs to get the world's attention. The world pays attention all right, but not the respectful kind. They hate God's Witnesses because they are tormented by them.

Perhaps God sends two Witnesses because:

- God often used pairs of workers to perform His missions, such as, Moses and Aaron, Joshua and Caleb, Paul and Silas, and Jesus sent His disciples out in pairs.
- Perhaps one will testify to Jews and one to Gentiles.
- Mosaic Law required two witnesses for testimony to be considered credible before someone could be put to death. Perhaps the testimony of these Two Witnesses will play a role in the trials on Judgment Day.

Their appearance will be strange in that they are clothed in sackcloth - the ancient Jewish clothing worn to express great grief. Surely, they will mourn over the world's spiritual condition; that countless

unbelieving people are perishing for eternity; and believing Jews and Gentiles are suffering and dying for their faith in Christ.

The ministry of the Witnesses is to proclaim Yeshua Hamashiach, that is, Jesus Messiah, to prophesy, preach repentance and the gospel, for 1260 days – that is 3½ years. Warren Wiersbe believes they are like Old Testament prophets – calling nations to repent and turn to God and performing supernatural miracles. And like the prophets of old, the people won't want to hear that they will die for their sin.

John depicts these two witnesses as “two olive trees and two lampstands.” This is a reference to Zechariah 4 where olive trees and lampstands symbolized spiritual revival given by the Holy Spirit. The Two Witnesses will stand in Jerusalem, bold and confident. 2 Peter 1:21 confirms, the Holy Spirit causes people to testify. Hopefully, their message will bring revival and some will be saved.

If you watched the coverage of the violent riots of 2020, I believe those scenes will pale in comparison to what surrounds the Two Witnesses. Although people will be hostile towards them, the Witnesses will be immortal because God protects them. He gives them power to spew fire from their mouth and annihilate anyone who dares attack them.

Some commentators believe the fire from their mouth refers to the Word of God because as God says in Jeremiah, “Is not My word like a fire?” (Jeremiah 23:29)

However, I take John's statements literally and believe God gives the Witnesses the power to fry, I mean, disintegrate – I mean, how I do I say it gently? “toast” their enemies.

As the world is overrun by demonic activity and unrestrained wickedness, God gives the Witnesses power to dispense death upon their enemies. They have authority to control nature by bringing world-wide drought upon the earth, cause plagues and turn water into blood which likely will produce widespread disease and epidemics.

These signs should prove to those who choose to believe, they are from God. Yet even with this demonstration of God's power, few will repent.

Not until their testimony is completed does God remove His protection from the Witnesses when “the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them and overpower and kill them.” The Witnesses will live up to the name - martyr. “Martus” is the Greek word for “witness” from which we get our word martyr.

Revelation 13 describes the beast as the Antichrist. The Abyss or bottomless pit is the holding place for the demon angels that followed Satan when he was thrown out of heaven.

Thousands of years ago, God said: “I have chosen Jerusalem as the place for My name to be honored.” (2 Chron. 6:6) Sadly, here, Jerusalem is referred to as “Sodom and Egypt”, symbolizing immorality, perversion, oppression and rejection of God.

For 3½ days the witnesses' dead bodies will be left on the street in Jerusalem. I'm sure television cameras, cell phones, and satellites will record the bodies of God's Witnesses rotting in the street and those images will be transmitted around the world. I imagine broadcasts, “Live from Jerusalem”, will show their dead bodies twenty-four hours a day. News analysts may ask, “What does it all mean?”. Interviewers

on the streets may ask people for their opinions, and “experts” will likely pontificate their impressions of the ghoulish site.

For 3½ years the Witnesses preached, and for 3½ days, they lay in the street. People’s allegiance to Antichrist will surely increase because he killed the two who tormented the conscience of the world.

To add to the world’s spirit of depravity, they are so elated over the deaths of the Two Witnesses, they celebrate and give gifts to one another! But Job reminds us, “triumphing of the wicked is short” (Job 20:5) and the decaying Witnesses will not be the last the world will see of them.

I believe God allows the death of His messengers and allows them to lay dead for 3½ days because something shocking happens which causes the world’s wicked merriment to cease.

While the world is watching and celebrating, to their horror, the two Witnesses are resurrected. Their hearts start beating. Their lungs are filled with the breath of life from God and they stand on their feet. Their rotting flesh is restored. Their clothing may be disheveled even blood-stained, but they are alive. I doubt the beast can dismiss this miracle.

But there’s more! A voice from heaven calls to the Witnesses, “Come up here.” The Antichrist and those that hate them will watch the Witnesses, surrounded in a cloud, ascend into heaven. God could have instantly raptured them, but perhaps as cameras capture these once-dead bodies rising into heaven it will lengthen the amount of time the world views this miracle.

So, do you want to know who the Two Witnesses are? God doesn’t tell us. We know they are males because the Greek pronouns John uses to describe them are in the masculine gender. Yet, there is much speculation as to who they could be.

Many believe they are Moses and Elijah. Like the Two Witnesses, Moses turned waters into blood and brought plagues upon the wicked. In Malachi, Elijah is prophesied to return before the end of the age, and he knew a thing or two about fire when he displayed God’s power against Satan’s priests. Elijah asked God to stop rain upon the earth, which God did - for 3½ years. Isn’t it interesting that’s the exact length of time of the Two Witnesses’ ministry? Both Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration and their ministries were also to warn and lead God’s people away from sin.

Others think they are Elijah and Enoch because they are the only two men taken into heaven without experiencing death. Enoch was a Gentile, and he may be used to preach to the Gentiles. Elijah was a Jew, and he may be used to preach to the Jews.

There are those who believe the Two Witnesses are simply two believers to whom the Holy Spirit gives the same power and mission as He did Elijah and Moses.

It’s interesting to speculate but does it matter who the Witnesses are? How would anyone recognize them even if they are from the Bible? It’s a mystery we’re not meant to know.

Immediately after the once-dead, now-alive Witnesses leave earth and rise into heaven, an earthquake hits Jerusalem. Seven thousand people die. “A tenth of the city” is shaken to rubble. Could it be

God's retaliation for the atrocities inflicted on His Two Witnesses? In Romans it says, "Vengeance is mine, says the Lord." (Romans 12:19)

John wrote that those who survive the earthquake give glory to God. Could that mean some will be saved? William Barclay believes only those who repent can give glory to God, however, few scholars embrace that scenario will happen.

Dr. David Jeremiah believes that "a surge of terror can trigger a momentary emotional response without producing a permanent change of heart". His example is 9/11. For months after the attacks, churches in America were filled, but not for long and people reverted to their pre-9/11 lives.

The interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets is over. John wrote, "the second woe is done, and the third woe is about to begin" (Revelation 11:14). John continues to record what will occur in the last half of the Tribulation, referred to as The Great Tribulation, meaning it will be more horrible than the first half.

Trumpets are used to announce the coming of someone or something amazing and the seventh and final trumpet blast will cause joy to erupt in heaven proclaiming it is time for the Kingdom of Messiah to begin. This will be the fulfillment of God's plan since the beginning of the world. It will be the end to sin and sickness, death and spiritual darkness, war and graveyards, because those are signs of Satan's kingdom and Christ will destroy it!

And John sees the twenty-four elders fall to the ground and hears them add their voices to the euphoria happening in heaven. They say, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One Who is and Who was, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry, and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people who revere Your name, both great and small — and for destroying those who destroy the earth." (Revelation 11:17,18)

The elders speak as if Christ's millennial rule is happening at that time, although Jesus doesn't establish His kingdom until the end of the Tribulation. The Greek verbs "have begun" and "has come" indicate absolute certainty that it will happen. We can liken it to election night when a candidate wins. For the candidate's supporters, there is joyous anticipation, even before their candidate is installed into office.

One more dramatic scene closes our study this week. As John records what he sees and hears in heaven, the Temple opens, and the Ark of God's Covenant is visible to all.

There are theories about the original Ark of the Covenant. Some say Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it when he burned the First Temple in 586 BC. Or that it was destroyed during the Babylon captivity. Or that Jeremiah hid it in a cave at Mt. Sinai. Or that the Muslims have it hidden away. And don't forget that in the movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the Ark has been stored away since WW2 among thousands of artifacts. And we know how factual that is!

I believe that especially for the Jews in the Tribulation, God allows them this powerful visual reminder that thousands of years ago, He chose them from all people on the earth to establish a covenant relationship with Him. And given that the Ark symbolizes God's presence, for those few Jews who accept

Jesus during the Tribulation, I hope when they see the Ark, they are comforted because the worst is yet to come.

John then witnesses immense atmospheric disturbances - lightning flashes, deep, heavy rumbling sounds, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a devastating hailstorm. These same ominous occurrences happened in Revelation 8 after the angel hurled fire to the earth and again, it will certainly terrify earth's inhabitants.

In these two chapters, we saw some amazing revelations through John's eyes. We heard testimonies about God's greatness from a powerful angel, from two powerful preachers, and from multitudes in heaven. And John was an example that God's Word is both sweet unto salvation and bitter for those who reject Him.

In future lessons, we'll begin to see judgments increasing and rapidly poured out upon the earth, like a barrage at the finale of a fireworks display. I doubt however, that there will be any "oohs and aahs".

For us today, does it seem like evil is winning? Pandemics and passports; masks and mandates; protests and pronouns. Can this world get much worse? God reveals yes it will, and He reveals what His response will be to the evil.

If you haven't called on Jesus for salvation, are you prepared for eternity? If your faith is in Jesus Christ as your Savior, you are under God's grace, your sins are forgiven, and you can look forward to that glorious day when Jesus will appear in the heavens.

I believe an angel has a trumpet pressed to his lips waiting to be told to signal the Rapture and believers will be outta here! But we're living around people who will go into the Tribulation. Prophecy is meant to motivate us to witness but we're running out of time to do what it says in the book of Jude, "Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment." (Jude 23) God told us the future so we can tell others how to avoid a future... of death. Who is on your heart to tell of the coming judgment?

I saw someone wearing a t-shirt that sums up this world and what I believe God has to say about it: "Normal isn't coming back. Jesus Christ is." Believers in Jesus have Him to look forward to.

"Maranatha! Come quickly Lord Jesus"