

West Valley Church
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**Revealed:
Uncovering the Mystery of Revelation
Part Seven: Revelation 10-11:14
All in a Woe¹**

The statue of a man stood over 100 feet tall. It was so large that if you tried to wrap your arms around the thumb, you wouldn't be able to reach your own hands.

It was one of the wonders of the ancient world, a colossus standing watch over the entrance to the bay on the island of Rhodes, an island in the Mediterranean off the coast of modern Turkey. It was erected in 280 BC as a tribute to their favorite god, Helios and stood watch over the bay for only 54 years until the earthquake of 226 BC destroyed it. Its ruins remained on the ground for over 800 years and continued as a tourist attraction. Legend says that it stood across both sides of the harbor, but historians say it was actually along side the harbor. It was the subject for many artists through the centuries, and is said to be the inspiration for French sculptor, Auguste Bartholdi, best known by his famous work, the 'Statue of Liberty' that stands today in New York. There are currently a group of architects, artists, engineers and scientists from Italy, Spain, and Greece who are attempting to gain enough support to rebuild The Colossus of Rhodes today, except they intend it to be five times as tall at 500 feet and will have a museum in it and a revolving restaurant on top.

Even with a newly rebuilt "Colossus" at 500 feet tall, it still would not be as large as the angel that John saw in his vision described in Revelation 10! If you've read the passage for today in advance, you are probably scratching your head wondering what in the world is going on?! We've gone from the silence in heaven in the first part of chapter 8 to this crazy, chaotic collection of actions and images that are chapters 10 and 11.

So today, at the half way point in our series, we will do what we've been attempting to do all throughout our time in Revelation: we'll try to understand what all the apocalyptic images are (and what they are not), we'll try to learn what they have to say to us as West Valley Church, and we'll learn how God wants us to apply it to our

¹ Sources: Carol Rotz, *Revelation: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (2012, Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, MO); Richard Eckley, *Revelation: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (2006, Wesleyan Publishing House, Indianapolis); Scott Daniels, *Marked by the Lamb: Pznaz Study on Revelation* (<http://drtscott.typepad.com/markedbythelamb/>); Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, ed. E Ray Clendenen, vol. 39, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2012), 228-251; John Yeatts, *Revelation*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003), 181-200; Lewis Foster, *Revelation: Unlocking the Scriptures for You*, Standard Bible Studies (Cincinnati, OH: Standar, 1989), 137-156

lives so that we can be the kind of Christians he intends for us to be. In the process, hopefully you will learn how better to read Revelation as well as the rest of the Bible.

From the beginning of chapter four through the end of chapter nine, John has been watching the activity of God almost entirely from the perspective of heaven. But in chapter ten John is back on earth watching the purpose of God as it is carried out among humanity. John sees coming from heaven...

1. The *Angel* (Revelation 10:1-7)

...that is so great he has one foot on a continent and another in the ocean. The angel's size represents the fact that the message he holds is *universal*; it covers the entire globe. This mighty angel could very well be Gabriel himself (Daniel 8:16-26; 9:20-27; 10:4-6; 12:6-7), but he's not identified by name. Not only is he enormous, but also John's description of him is highly symbolic:

“He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand.” (Revelation 10:1-2, niv)

There are some clear implications with these images. Remember in the last chapter we noticed that the trumpet judgments reflected the plagues that God brought on Egypt? One scholar, Dr. Scott Daniels explains this angel image in light of the Exodus event: “It is very likely that John is continuing to paint with the colors of the Old Testament, in particular the Exodus story. The (rain)bow may recall God's promise through Noah, the pillars of fire God's presence in the wilderness, and the scroll the Law on tablets of stone.”² Daniels is not alone in that interpretation – most scholars agree. The description of this angel also has similarities to descriptions of Christ in the Bible (Daniel 7:13; Revelation 1; Acts 1:9). But it is very clear that the angel is *not* Christ. The reason this angel has similarities with Christ is because his message and actions come directly from Christ Himself. His message is fully authorized and dictated from the Lion who is the Lamb. That's why we're told:

“He gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion.” (Revelation 10:3, niv)

He has come directly from the throne-room presence of the Lion-Lamb Himself, Jesus Christ.

The angel's roar is so great that we are told it awakens the “seven thunders.” This is a curious thing. The seven thunders “awaken” and say something. John begins to write down what they say, but John is told by a voice from heaven not to write it down and instead to seal it up. So why are we even told it happened, if we're not allowed to know what they said? And who are “they,” anyway? (No really; I'm asking you!)

² Daniels

Whatever “they” are, the way John uses the word “the” in the original language means the first century readers knew what he meant by “seven thunders.” Unfortunately, that meaning has been lost to us. We *can* get some hint, though, from Psalm 29. That Psalm praises the power and awesomeness and glory of God. It says that God’s voice is over the waters and that his glory “thunders.” That phrase “the Lord’s voice” is repeated seven times in the Psalm, so it very well could be that the “seven thunders” John is describing is the voice of God.

So why is John told not to write it down? For one thing, this is a familiar motif all through Revelation: it reveals, while at the same time it withholds. The reason Revelation does that a lot is to constantly remind us that, for as much as we know about God and his ways, there is much to God that is, and always will be, a mystery to us. His ways are beyond our ways, as Isaiah told us (55:8-9). So God’s whole plan in human history, especially the end, is going to be a mystery to us, and we’d better get used to that.

There is also a strong suggestion that the “seven thunders” is a series of seven warnings that God has decided to withhold and *not* carry out. Remember last week we saw that people will be so hard-hearted that they are not willing to repent? So it could very well be that God is saying that there is no point in carrying out these “seven thunder” judgments – people won’t respond anyway.

Isn’t that a horribly sad picture?! That we would stop listening to God, and be so unwilling to listen to him and to turn to him, that he finally gives up on trying to get our attention?

At any rate, then this mighty angel raises his right hand to heaven and solemnly swears that the answer to the prayers of God’s people is about to take place (remember we’ve been hearing about those prayers since chapter six). The time of the delay in God’s ultimate redemption of people and creation is over. God’s mysterious purposes will be brought to completion. The end, when everything that is wrong is made right and everyone who is going to turn to God will do so, the end is all going to take place after the next trumpet blast. For the early church, this would’ve been good news. The seven thunders would’ve delayed the end even longer, but now the time for the end has arrived.

I need to remind you at this point that, as has been the case so far, John is not trying to give us a chronology of events. He is not interested in a sequence of historical events as much as the certainty of the final act. In other words, he isn’t describing things with a sense of one thing happening right after another, nor is he indicating any dates or sequences in which these things are going to happen. He is more interested in *timeliness* than *timelines*. He is *describing what* God is doing more than *prescribing when* God will do it. *Revelation is descriptive more than predictive.*³ So from this point on, John is really focusing his narrative on “his inspired understanding of the nature of God’s ultimate redemption.”⁴

³ Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Accidental Saints: Finding God in All the Wrong People* (NY, Crown Publishing Co., 2015) 58

⁴ Daniels

Following the declaration from the angel, the attention in the scene turns to...

2. A ***Little Scroll*** (Revelation 10:8-11)

Unlike the scroll in chapter five, this scroll is already opened. The original language points out that the scroll was small, or little. John was able to take it in his hand, so it probably appeared *very* small in the giant angel's hand! But it could also be that it is a small part of the larger scroll with seven seals that was in the hand of the One seated on the throne. This small scroll then would symbolize *John's story*, and *the story of the church*, as they – *and we* – live into the greater story that is God's purposes in the world.⁵ In other words, we have a part in the story!

The angel instructs John to take the scroll and eat it. There is some strange imagery if you are not familiar with what it refers to. This refers back to what happened with the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel (2:8-3:3). Ezekiel was instructed to take a scroll and eat it, and when he ate the scroll, it tasted as sweet as honey to him. It tasted that way for John, too – at first. Then it turned sour in John's stomach. So what does that mean? In both cases, God wants his spokesperson to ingest God's Word. By consuming the scroll, the message is assimilated into John's life; it has become a part of John. This is similar to why we share communion – we want the death of Christ to become *our* story, to become the fabric of our very lives. We can't get enough of it. We consume the Good News of God's love for us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

So if the Gospel message is sweet, why did it turn sour? The Good News is exactly that – it tastes good! And as we consume God's Word, it is sweet because it is part of God's will and purpose. Anyone who has trusted Christ's death and resurrection to save them and change them knows how wonderful it feels to be forgiven and set free from sin; to have the voice of God and the presence of the Spirit in their lives. But at the same time it is hard to digest because the purposes of God for John and for the early church and us included walking through terrible tribulation, persecutions, suffering, and even death. It is hard for *us* to digest because the truth is, being a Christian means we must sacrifice and at least be willing to go through persecutions and tribulation, whether we ever have to face it to that extreme or not. Being a Christian also means we are expected to set aside our own selfish desires and determine to spend our lives living for Christ, serving others, and introducing others to Jesus. It is a sacrifice, and it means we might also be rejected or persecuted by the very people we are loving and serving.

I remember my first experience with some of that after I became a Christian in high school. I had a group of friends that I would hang out with and party with. After I got saved, naturally I quit partying and all that wild life and language. But I still liked my friends and wanted to hang out with them, and I especially didn't want them to miss out on what I was experiencing. So I continued to hang out with them. I went to parties with them, but I didn't drink or do any of the other things. Then it dawned on me one day that for three weeks in a row, after the Friday night football

⁵ Daniels

games, all my friends said they had to go to work the next morning or that they were tired, so they either dropped me off at home or just left without me. I found out that they were going to parties without me. It hurt me, so I asked them about it. They said, "We're really glad you found Jesus, but you keep talking about Him. And it kills our buzz. We feel guilty getting drunk and stoned with you around." It was then, as a brand new Christian only a few months old, that I realized that being a Christian meant there were going to be times that the world rejected me, because they rejected Christ. I didn't get a persecution complex, I just realized that whether I wanted it or not, people were going to treat me differently than they had before.

But let me say this: some overzealous Christians think that unless they get rejected they aren't being real witnesses, so they get more and more obnoxious about it. And the more obnoxious they get, of course the more they get rejected. And they more they get rejected, they more pride they take in that and the more obnoxious they get. That's *not* sharing the Good News, that's being obnoxious and stupid. We are supposed to *love* people. The Bible says:

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But *do this with gentleness and respect.*"
(1 Peter 3:15, niv)

So we need to be loving and respectful, but at the same time, we need to be willing to make significant sacrifices in our comfort levels if we are going to follow Jesus.

When John ate the scroll, he was no longer *writing down* the message; he was now *part of* the message. Theologian Stanley Hauerwas has often said, "The Church does not just bear the message of Christ, the Church is the message of Christ."⁶

This is the point of the entire passage, and I think you'll see that by the time we are done. "The early church as they walk through the challenges set before them do not just proclaim the message of God's redemption, they embody that redemption in their life together and in the way they treat their enemies."⁷

When the angel declared, "there will be no more delay," the early church didn't decide it was time to hole up and hunker down and huddle together and wait for the end. They knew the end meant they needed to go out and be witnesses *all the more*. The gift of the Gospel and the consuming mandate of the Word of God sent them out into the world of peoples, nations, languages, and kings. The time was short; so they ramped up their efforts. They consumed God's purpose; it oozed from their pores. John's eating the scroll is a sign of the church's mission to carry the gospel into the world around us: to both speak and show witness of the Gospel, introducing others to Jesus with our lives and words. *This is vital to the message of Revelation.*

If you believe we are getting close to the end, prove it: be a bolder messenger of the Gospel. For those who are so busy trying to pinpoint years and days of events in Revelation, let me just ask: "Why are you doing that? What is your motivation? Are you hoping that knowing dates will tell you when to let off the gas and coast home?"

⁶ Daniels

⁷ Daniels

So you know how much longer to hunker down in an apocalypse shelter with your rations and ammo? If you are really reading Revelation honestly, you will easily see that the clear challenge is *to get out and show Christ to others*. If you really think the date is fast approaching, you will quadruple your efforts to see your friends saved. Quit trying to find a hidden meaning and read what's in plain sight. I beg you! The time is short friends. We've got to care enough to personally see people saved around us.

Well, the scene shifts to...

3. The *Range of a Reed* (Revelation 11:1-2)

There is a brief and unusual scene where John is given a reed, which is a weedy stick that grows near rivers. It actually grew in predictable segments and was used for measuring, so it's like the passage is saying he was handed a ruler. Then John is told to measure the Temple with it. These two verses could be considered a sort of "acted out parable"⁸ or an object lesson. Some people read this and think it is talking about the literal Temple, either of their time or when it might be rebuilt in our day. But there are problems with that. For one, the Temple was completely destroyed over 20 years *before* John's vision, so there's no way it was that Temple. So what about a new physical temple? Well, what does the New Testament say the Temple is: is it a building, or the people of God? It is the Church, right? So John's measuring of "the Temple" is really about measuring the *church* – the people of God. John is told that all those "inside" the measurement will be protected, but those "outside" won't be. It uses the metaphor of the "court of the Jews" and the court of the Gentiles," but don't be confused – it's not making statements about Jews and Gentiles. It's making statements about Christians and non-Christians. What we are being told here is that no matter how intense the persecution gets (and every indication is that there *will* be intense tribulation), even if and when we are killed for following Christ, we *still* have the ultimate, eternal Temple – Heaven – that we will live in forever. For the same reasons, these verses are not speaking of the specific geographic city of Jerusalem, but it is a metaphor for the people of God.

John's told that those who attack the Temple will be able to do so for "42 months." There has been a lot of debate about this between those who take Revelation too literally and those who take it too figuratively. The literalists say these two little verses point to a rebuilding of the Temple and that this is the first half of a specific number of days that you can set your calendar by. The figuratists say it is not anything specific, just a reminder that we will all face trials in this life. Both camps are pretty entrenched, which makes an important point:

We don't know without a doubt how these things are going to play out, so we need to learn the lessons from what we do know for sure.

If you haven't already figured it out, we are going to have to become comfortable with what we *don't* know, and start being obedient to what we *do* know. So what *do*

⁸ Rotz

we really know? Well, we already know the Temple reference is the Church, so we can't get a physical Temple being rebuilt, at least not from these two verses. What about the time frame? Forty two months, or three and a half years, or 1260 days (11:3; 12:6) is also referred to in Revelation as "a time, times, and half a time" (12:14). Most scholars agree that it is *not* literal. In the Old Testament, forty-two months is always associated with violent death (2 Kings 2:23–24; 10:14).

The term also recalls the time frame of Daniel's prophecies of tribulation (Daniel 7:25; 9:27; 12:7, 11, 12). The initial fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy occurred during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes from 175 to 164 B.C. (as recorded in 1 Macc 1–3; 2 Macc 5). The Jews suffered horrible persecution and the desecration of their Temple from 168-165 B.C. – a period of three and a half years. That amount of time became synonymous with suffering in their collective memory, so that it signified "violent useless killing". In the Gospels (Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14), the fulfillment of Daniel 9:27 (the dividing of the seventieth "seven") is related to the Roman siege of Jerusalem in AD 70, which lasted about three and a half years.⁹ So there was plenty of biblical and corporate memory for the early Christians to hear the time frame and understand it meant *at least* that they'd better buckle up and prepare for more intense tribulation, persecution, and suffering.

So there's not really any specific calendar date that is a peg here that you can hang a hat on – there's not even nail sticking out of some wood. But we do know that we must endure any and all kinds of personal sacrifice, hardship and suffering as we introduce people to Jesus Christ, and that it's going to get more and more intense to the final point before the end.

Now what about...

4. The Two Witnesses (Revelation 11:3-14)

This section is what's called "narrative prophecy." The main emphasis we see is more of the continual example for us to be faithful witnesses. The unfolding drama is very different from the previous vision of the angel and scroll eating. Two cryptic characters are introduced who witness, are killed, and then are resurrected. There are a whole lot of different interpretations on who they are and how this will be fulfilled, but here's what I can tell you: it's best not to get too caught up in the details, and let's make sure we hear the message to the church through the symbolic actions of these two witnesses.¹⁰

Their role is as prophets, or to declare the Word of God to people. There are two of them, which is what it took to validate a witness's testimony as "true" in their culture. They are dressed in typical prophet's clothing, which represented mourning. They mourned because they grieved about what will happen to people who don't listen to God's offer of hope and salvation. Does that make you and I

⁹ Carol Rotz, *Revelation: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2012), 163.

¹⁰ Rotz

grieve? We're told they are two olive trees and lampstands. John is referring back to the message of the prophet Zechariah (4:2-6, 11-14). The lampstand for Zechariah represents God's people, the temple, and God's presence among the people. Sounds like the Church again, doesn't it? The two olive trees in Zechariah represent the religious and political leaders of Israel at that time, and is meant to show that God works through people in spite of their weaknesses. Sounds like the church again, doesn't it?

The description of the abilities of the two witnesses tells us that they are models of Moses and Elijah. Like Elijah they have the power to consume enemies with fire (2 Kings 1:10 ff.); prevent rain (1 Kings 17:1); and ascend to heaven (2 Kings 2:11). Like Moses they turn waters to blood (Exodus 7:14-18) and strike the earth with plagues (Exodus 8:16). (We are told they have the power to kill anyone who opposes them at any time, but we are not told they actually do it. This means they have the full authority of their message. Rejection of the prophetic witness results in spiritual death by the very words that are meant to bring eternal life.) There was an expectation among the Jews that one or both of Moses and Elijah would return (see Malachi 4:5; Deuteronomy 18:18) and remember both appeared at Jesus' transfiguration (Matthew 17:3-4; Mark 9:4-5; Luke 9:30-33).¹¹

The length of their ministry happens at the same time as the period of violence spoken of earlier – the “three and a half years” period of intense persecution: 1) persecution, 2) witnessing, 3) the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah). So clearly, in the midst of violent persecution, we have the law and the prophets to give authority to our witness. What is our witness? Jesus said that *all* of the Law and the Prophets are fulfilled in the twin command to love God and love people (Matthew 22:37-40).

The witnesses are then martyred. Their faithful witness results in death, and they are faithful witnesses with their death. But the language indicates that they were killed only when their ministry was completed. Their lives were not cut short; they had completed their mission. When you wholeheartedly witness for Christ you will not die before your time.

The one who kills them is the beast. This is the first mention of the beast, and I'd love to go into detail about who this is, but we'll save that for his next appearance. (Sorry!) One thing is clear: he gets his marching orders from hell itself.

The bodies of the two martyrs remain in public view, which for Jews was the ultimate disgrace (Isaiah 5:25). We're told that happens in “the Great City.” What's that? So far, that term has been used for both Jerusalem and Babylon (which to the original reader meant Rome). It's called “Sodom” and “Egypt,” representing both the degree of its sin and its desire to enslave God's people, whether spiritually or literally. So...that could be anywhere! Their bodies are exposed for “3 ½ days.” This emphasizes the disparity of their humiliation against the “years” of their ministry,

¹¹ Carol Rotz, *Revelation: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2012), 174.

meaning it doesn't come close to undoing their impact. It also reminds us that they are just like the one they serve – Christ – who was dead and buried for three days.

“Every people, tribe, language, and nation” of the world views their bodies. This is a direct opposite of the “people, tribe, language, and nation” that made up the Church in chapter seven. This is telling us that the rejection of Christ's message is worldwide. The unsaved world was so tormented by the truth of God's message through the witnesses, that they all celebrated and even exchanged gifts at the deaths of the witnesses like some sort of morbid Christmas party.

But after the witnesses are dead and decomposing, God brings them back to full life and health, and they are taken up to heaven in a cloud. The cloud represents God's acceptance of them into heaven. Remember that the Old Testament indicates that both Elijah and Moses were simply taken into heaven, and of course Jesus ascended into a cloud. This is such a powerful display that there is an earthquake, which represented a sign of divine judgment, and also tied back to the earthquake when Jesus died and was resurrected. A tenth of the “Great city” is destroyed in the earthquake. There isn't anything in the original language to indicate that this is a specific number; it just means “a lot.” And then we are told the number of people who are killed is 7,000. Seven means what? So 7 – complete – and a thousand – a whole lot – means that God knows exactly the complete number who die in their sins. But finally, the resurrection of the witnesses and the devastating earthquake scares everyone else! There is an indication that it literally scares the “hell” out of the people who remain, because they are so terrified that they finally praise God. Literally it can mean “they acknowledge the truth” or it can mean “conversion.” Finally!

Then, we are told, comes the time for the third “woe” – the end. The *very last* thing that happens before the end: a bunch of people in the world get saved! So don't ever give up witnessing!

So let me summarize all this if I can by helping us make sure we don't miss...

5. The ***Word*** for ***Us***

We could spend a lot of energy attempting to identify specific locations and people from these passages. You can do that if you want – I can give you the resources because I've read through pages and pages and pages of research. There are several opinions among scholars, and there are way, way more opinions from people who are nowhere near being scholars. Will there be literally two witnesses? Maybe. But *we know for sure* that they represent the church, because they are faithful witnesses in the midst of persecution and they have the authority of the Law and the Prophets behind them. Will there be a literal earthquake? Maybe, but *we know for sure* that there will be divine judgment against those who don't accept the message. Is there a literal city? Maybe, but *we know for sure* it could be any city in the world that rejects God's message and life and people. Will there be tribulation for three and a half

years? Well, *we know for sure* there's been tribulation for the entire history of the church. Of course *we also know for sure* it's going to get worse.

So we *must* focus on what *we know for sure*, what the images tell us, and how we are supposed to live as Christians because of it. That means, like John, **we have a part in the story. We have a message of the Good News of God for the entire world, that we can share by introducing people to Jesus – telling them who he is and what how much he loves them.** We have a front row seat to see what will happen to people who reject Christ, and it is horrible. There will come a time when God stops trying to reach people. There is not anyone I love that is not a Christian that I want to see go through that. I don't even want to see the people I don't love go through that!

We have the vivid example that we are to remain faithful witnesses even though we get rejected, persecuted, or even killed. We know we've got to make it our *number one priority* to tell people about Christ regardless of what they do to us, because we have been "measured" – we have the promise of heaven forever. We will not die before our time.

So, as usual my friends, if you are hearing this and you are not a Christian, you have just gotten a sneak preview of what's ahead for you. I beg you: take seriously what God wants to save you from and let him save you.

Christian: our calling is clear: we must take our part of the story and not only *tell* the message, but **BE** the message, everywhere we go, on purpose, in the hopes that others will respond. Because Revelation 11 tells that even at the very last minute of history, before the end, there will still be people who will respond to the Gospel. Don't give up; in fact, turn it up. Introduce people to the Jesus you know.

Pray