

The Book of Revelation

Lesson 9: The Little Scroll and the Two Witnesses -- Revelation 10:1–11:19

A mighty angel comes down from heaven wrapped in a cloud, a rainbow over his head, his face like the sun and his legs like pillars of fire (10:1). He plants one foot on the sea and one on the land, claiming the whole world for the God he serves, and in his hand is “a little scroll open” (10:2). When he calls out, seven thunders sound, and John lifts his pen to write, only to be told, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down” (10:4). Not everything is for us to know. Some of God’s purposes stay folded in His own counsel. But then the angel swears by the One who lives forever that there will be no more delay, that “in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled” (10:7). The end is coming. God’s hidden purpose, His long campaign to redeem a people and put down all evil, is racing toward its completion.

Then a voice tells John to take the open scroll from the angel’s hand and eat it. “It will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey” (10:9). He takes it and eats, and it is exactly so: sweet on the tongue, bitter in the belly (10:10). Here is the whole life of the church compressed into a single image. The word of God is sweet to receive, honey to the soul, good news of a reigning Lamb and a redeemed people. But it is bitter to carry, because to take God’s word into the world is to take up a costly commission. “You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings” (10:11). The same gospel that is joy to believe is hard to proclaim, and the messenger who swallows it will taste both the sweetness and the cost.

Chapter 11 hands John a measuring rod and tells him to measure the temple of God and those who worship there, but to leave out the outer court, “for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months” (11:2). This is not a building project. It is a picture of God preserving His true worshiping people, measured, counted, secured, even while the world is permitted to trample the outer life of the church for a limited season. Then come two witnesses, clothed in sackcloth, who prophesy for 1,260 days (11:3). They are the witnessing church, drawn in the colors of Moses and Elijah, two witnesses because God’s law requires two for valid testimony. The beast makes war on them and kills them, and their bodies lie in the street while the world gloats and exchanges gifts (11:7–10). For three and a half days it looks like the church is finished.

And then “a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet” (11:11). The slain witnesses rise. A voice calls them up to heaven, their enemies watch in terror, and the pattern is unmistakable: the church follows her Lord through death into vindication. This is not a forecast of one future tribulation on a calendar; it is the shape of the whole age, the church faithfully witnessing, suffering, seeming to die, and being raised by the God who raised Jesus. The chapter ends with the seventh trumpet and a shout that should make every weary saint stand taller: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ,

and he shall reign forever and ever" (11:15). The outcome is not in doubt. The Lamb already reigns, and He always will. So eat the scroll, sweet and bitter both, and bear your witness; the kingdom is His.

Group Discussion: The little scroll is sweet in the mouth and bitter in the stomach (10:9–10), a picture of God's word as joy to receive and costly to carry. Where have you found the word of God sweet, and where have you found that living it out or speaking it openly turned out to be bitter and costly?

Personal Reflection: The two witnesses prophesy in sackcloth and are killed, yet God raises them and vindicates them (11:3, 7, 11). In what specific area of your life right now do you feel like your faithfulness is being trampled or going nowhere? How does the promise that God raises and vindicates His witnessing people steady you to keep bearing witness?

Read Revelation 10:1–11:19

Study Questions

1. A mighty angel stands on sea and land with a little open scroll, and when the seven thunders speak John is told, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down" (10:4), yet the angel swears "there would be no more delay" and "the mystery of God would be fulfilled" (10:6–7). What is this scene teaching about what God reveals, what He keeps hidden, and the certainty that His saving purpose is racing toward completion?
2. John is told to eat the scroll, and it is "sweet as honey" in the mouth but bitter in the stomach (10:9–10). Where in your own walk has God's word been sweet to receive, and where have you tasted the bitterness of actually carrying it and living it out?
3. After eating the scroll John is told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings" (10:11). Read symbolically, how does the eaten scroll picture the church's commission to take God's word into the world, and why does that commission come with both sweetness and cost?

4. The angel's commission sends the word to "many peoples and nations and languages and kings" (10:11). Who are the people God has placed within your reach who need to hear His word, and what makes you hesitate to speak it to them?

5. John is told to measure "the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there," but to leave out the outer court, "given over to the nations" to be trampled "for forty-two months" (11:1-2). Since this is not a literal rebuilt temple, what does the measuring picture about how God preserves His true worshiping people even as the world is permitted to trample them for a limited time?

6. The outer court is trampled while the worshipers within are measured and kept (11:1-2). When your outward circumstances feel trampled, your reputation, your comfort, your sense of security, what would it mean to trust that God has measured and secured the part of you that truly belongs to Him?

7. The two witnesses prophesy 1,260 days in sackcloth, with power like Moses and Elijah, and "if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth" (11:3-6). Reading the two witnesses as the witnessing church (two for valid testimony, drawn in the colors of Moses and Elijah), what is this passage teaching about the church's task and protection during the whole age between Christ's comings?

8. For a time the witnesses seem invincible, then the beast kills them and their bodies lie in the street while the world celebrates (11:7–10). Have you ever felt that your witness for Christ had been defeated, mocked, or left lying in the street? What does this passage stir up in you about staying faithful when it looks like faith has lost?

9. The two witnesses are killed, lie dead three and a half days, then “a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up” and were called to heaven (11:11–12); and the seventh trumpet announces, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever” (11:15). Explain from this text why the 1,260 days and forty-two months are symbolic of the church’s limited age of suffering and not a literal future seven-year tribulation, why the death and resurrection of the witnesses is the pattern of the whole witnessing church rather than two end-time individuals, and why the seventh trumpet announces Christ’s reign as a present and consummated reality rather than a still-future earthly millennium (compare Acts 2:33–36; Ephesians 1:20–22).

10. Look back across the whole vision, the open scroll sweet and bitter, the measured worshipers, the witnesses slain and raised, and the trumpet that declares Christ already reigns. Name one specific way the Lord is using this passage to form you, whether to swallow His word whole, to bear costly witness, or to keep going because you know how the story ends.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Ezekiel 2:8–3:3, the prophet told to eat the scroll that was sweet as honey before a hard commission; Jeremiah 20:9, the word like a burning fire the prophet cannot hold in; Matthew 5:11–12, blessed are you when persecuted, for great is your reward; Acts 2:33–36, Christ exalted to God's right hand and reigning as Lord now; 1 Corinthians 15:24–26, Christ reigning until every enemy, the last being death, is put under His feet.

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