

THE PROPHETIC WITNESS OF THE CHURCH

Lesson 6

Revelation 10:1–11:14



WELCOME

Have you ever had the opportunity to be a witness or a juror in a trial? If so, what did you appreciate or enjoy about the experience? If not, what do you think you would like about being a witness or a juror?

INTRODUCTION

In Lesson 5 we studied the trumpet judgments.¹ The passage in this lesson is the interlude² between the 6th and 7th trumpets. This part of John's vision speaks to God's mysterious plan and the purpose and destiny of the Church³ as a prophetic witness.⁴ It also reveals more of John's prophetic role.⁵

Tips for meaningful engagement with the Word:

- For this lesson each chapter will be presented separately with questions in between. The verse numbers have been removed from the Scripture passages and footnotes have been inserted. These footnotes are intended to help clarify the passage and provide better understanding.

¹ Revelation 8:6–9:21; 11:15–19

² In performance arts, an interlude is a transitional moment for audiences to catch their breath between acts—an opportunity to recalibrate and refocus on the bigger picture. (Green)

³ As witness to the truth about Jesus Christ the role of the Church is to let that truth be known through words and actions.

⁴ Duvall, 150

⁵ Prophets have a message from God to share with others.



WORD

As you come to the Word, pause and ask God to make it come alive for you. Ask Him to make it understandable and transformational.

Revelation 10:1–11

Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, surrounded by a cloud,⁶ with a rainbow over his head.⁷ His face shone like the sun, and his feet were like pillars of fire.⁸ And in his hand was a small scroll⁹ that had been opened. He stood with his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land.¹⁰ And he gave a great shout like the roar of a lion. And when he shouted, the seven thunders answered.¹¹

When the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write. But I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Keep secret what the seven thunders said, and do not write it down.”¹²

Then the angel I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand toward heaven. He swore an oath in the name of the one who lives forever and ever, who created the heavens and everything in them, the earth and everything in it, and the sea and everything in it.¹³ He

⁶ The cloud is usually associated with the presence of God. (**Exodus 13:21; 2 Chronicles 5:13–14**). (Barton, 109)

⁷ The rainbow is a biblical symbol of God’s covenant with humanity to never flood the earth again (**Genesis 9:8–17**). (*Illustrated Study Bible*, 2354)

⁸ Some scholars connect this image to the pillar of fire by which God guided and protected the Israelites in the wilderness (**Exodus 13:21–22; 14:19–24**). (Mounce, 207)

⁹ The designation “small scroll” may say more about the large size of the mighty angel than the size of the scroll. (Duvall, 151)

¹⁰ For John’s audience, this description of the angel may have brought to mind the Colossus of Rhodes—an enormous statue, 105 feet tall with one foot on the island of Rhodes and one foot on the mainland. It was so large that ships would sail in the waterway between the statue’s legs. (Barton, 110) The angel’s size and stance symbolize his authority over all creation. (Mounce, 208)

¹¹ In Revelation, thunder is associated with divine judgment (**Revelation 4:5; 6:1; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18**). (Duvall, 151)

¹² No one knows what John heard from the seven thunders, but scholars suggest they could be judgments, warnings or perhaps truths of God. (Barton, 111) In this secret, as throughout Revelation, God’s intentions in the world are revealed without eliminating the mystery of His ways. (*Illustrated Study Bible*, 2356)

¹³ The oath sworn in the name of God, the eternal creator of all things, reminds those who belong to Him of God’s power to accomplish what He set out to do. Both the beginning and the end of history are under God’s sovereign control. (Mounce, 211)

said, “There will be no more delay.¹⁴ When the seventh angel blows his trumpet, God’s mysterious plan will be fulfilled. It will happen just as he announced it to his servants the prophets.”¹⁵

Then the voice from heaven spoke to me again: “Go and take the open scroll from the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.”

So I went to the angel and told him to give me the small scroll. “Yes, take it and eat it,”¹⁶ he said. “It will be sweet as honey in your mouth, but it will turn sour in your stomach!” So I took the small scroll from the hand of the angel, and I ate it! It was sweet in my mouth, but when I swallowed it, it turned sour in my stomach.¹⁷

Then I was told, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings.”

1. The angel described in the first paragraph of Revelation 10 symbolized the presence and glory of God. It also symbolized God’s covenant with, and protection and guidance for, His people. The angel’s huge size and thundering voice dominated the landscape. What thoughts or feelings come to mind as you imagine this mighty angel?

¹⁴ The background for these statements (**Revelation 10:5–6**) can be found in Daniel 12, where a man dressed in linen and standing above the river was asked “How long will it be until these shocking events are over?” The man answered that it would go on for “a time, times, and half a time” (indicating a limited period, appointed by God). (*Illustrated Study Bible*, 1512) The martyrs in **Revelation 6:10–11** also asked “How long?” Finally, in this passage, the answer becomes, “There will be no more delay.” (Mounce, 210) God’s plan will be fulfilled.

¹⁵ “John was pointing to God’s removal of all evil and the final exaltation of Christ as Lord.” (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2185) **Joel 2:1–3, 10–11; Amos 5:18–20; Zephaniah 1:14–18; Ephesians 1:9–10**

¹⁶ The instruction to eat the scroll indicates the necessity for people who communicate God’s message to first embrace that message and let it become part of their lives and characters. (Mounce, 214)

¹⁷ John’s vision of eating the scroll is similar to the prophet Ezekiel’s vision (**Ezekiel 3:1–14**). The sweetness represents God’s sovereign promises and plan to conquer evil and bring forth a new heaven and earth. The bitterness represents the suffering and persecution that God’s people will endure as necessary aspects of finalizing God’s purposes for this world. (Duvall, 152-153)

2. **Revelation 10:7** states that, “when the seventh angel blows his trumpet, God’s mysterious plan will be fulfilled.” In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul also wrote about God’s mysterious plan:
“God has now revealed to us His mysterious will regarding Christ— which is to fulfill his own good plan. And this is the plan: At the right time He will bring everything together under the authority of Christ— everything in heaven and on earth.” (**Ephesians 1:9–10**)

The time is coming when all things will be brought under the authority of Christ. Write down one or two things that might change for you if everything in our world were under Christ’s authority.

3. John was compelled to speak about God and His plan for all people and nations, both encouraging and warning those listening. In the process, he experienced both the sweetness and the internal upset of this message. In what sense might the truth about God and His mysterious plan cause internal upset in a person’s life or among a group of hearers?

How might people experience God’s truth and mysteriousness as something that is “sweet as honey”?

Revelation 11:1–14

Then I was given a measuring stick, and I was told, “Go and measure the Temple of God¹⁸ and the altar, and count the number of worshipers.¹⁹ But do not measure the outer courtyard, for it has been turned over to the nations.²⁰ They will trample the holy city for 42 months.²¹ And I will give power to my two witnesses,²² and they will be clothed in burlap²³ and will prophesy during those 1,260 days.”

These two prophets are the two olive trees and the two lampstands²⁴ that stand before the Lord of all the earth. If anyone tries to harm them, fire flashes from their mouths and consumes their enemies. This is how anyone who tries to harm them must die. They have power to shut the sky so that no rain will fall for as long as they prophesy. And they have the power to turn the rivers and oceans into blood, and to strike the

¹⁸ The literal brick-and-mortar temple did not exist at the time John wrote Revelation because it had been destroyed along with all of Jerusalem in AD 70. The people of God had become His temple (**1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21; 1 Peter 2:5**). (Johnson, 203)

¹⁹ The measuring and counting symbolizes “God’s precise knowledge of and care for his people who belong to him.” (*Illustrated Study Bible*, 2356) God’s care includes protection, not necessarily from physical harm but certainly from spiritual harm. (Barton, 117) In the Old Testament, the prophet Zechariah also had a vision of a man who came to measure the temple. God’s answer in Zechariah as to why it needed to be measured was also spiritual protection: “For I will be a wall of fire around her, and I will be the glory in her midst” (**Zechariah 2:5**). (Johnson, 204)

²⁰ The outer courtyard in the temple was where Gentiles were allowed to enter. In this vision it likely symbolizes those who are not yet part of God’s people. These people are not under God’s spiritual protection and “can only be converted or judged.” (Johnson, 204)

²¹ 42 months = 1,260 days = 3 ½ years, or a time, times, and half a time: This way of describing time was associated with “the period of Jewish suffering under the Syrian despot Antiochus Epiphanes in 167-164 BC. It became a conventional symbol for a limited period of time during which evil would be allowed to reign.” (Mounce, 221)

²² The identity of the two witnesses is unknown. Moses and Elijah have been suggested since they were at the transfiguration. They brought judgment on the earth similar to **Revelation 11:6** and they represent the law and the prophets. Others have suggested Enoch and Elijah because they did not die (**Genesis 5:21–24; 2 Kings 2:11–12**). Additional possibilities include Peter and Paul or James and John. (*Illustrated Study Bible*, 2356) Many scholars agree that likely they are not two individuals, but are a symbol of the witnessing Church, presented as two witnesses to emphasize their function of confirming God’s message by the testimony of “two or three witnesses” (**Deuteronomy 17:6**). (Mounce, 223)

²³ Clothing made of burlap was symbolic of mourning or repentance. (**Genesis 37:34; Esther 4:1; Jonah 3:6**)

²⁴ “The image of the two lampstands/two olive trees/two witnesses, is ... a picture of the church under pressure in the world, full of the olive oil of the Holy Spirit, burning brightly with the fire of God.” (Johnson, 206)

earth with every kind of plague as often as they wish.²⁵

When they complete their testimony, the beast²⁶ that comes up out of the bottomless pit will declare war against them, and he will conquer them and kill them. And their bodies will lie in the main street of Jerusalem, the city that is figuratively called “Sodom” and “Egypt,” the city where their Lord was crucified.²⁷ And for three and a half days, all peoples, tribes, languages, and nations will stare at their bodies. No one will be allowed to bury them.²⁸ All the people who belong to this world will gloat over them and give presents to each other to celebrate the death of the two prophets who had tormented them.

But after three and a half days,²⁹ God breathed life into them, and they stood up!³⁰ Terror struck all who were staring at them. Then a loud voice from heaven called to the two prophets, “Come up here!” And they rose to heaven in a cloud as their enemies watched.

At the same time there was a terrible earthquake³¹ that destroyed a tenth of the city. Seven thousand people died in that earthquake, and everyone else was terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.³² The second terror is past, but look, the third terror is coming quickly.³³

²⁵ The dramatic imagery of this paragraph recalls the power of Moses and Elijah (**Exodus 7–11; Numbers 11:1–3; 1 Kings 18:36–39; 2 Kings 1:9–16**). It pictures the witnessing Church carrying out its prophetic ministry with the same Spirit and power as Moses and Elijah. (Duvall, 158)

²⁶ “The beast, introduced here, will be described more fully in Revelation 13 and 17.” (Duvall, 158) He rises from the abyss, which represents the satanic underworld, to attack and kill the witnesses. (Barton, 125)

²⁷ These are all places that were hostile to God and His people. (*Illustrated Study Bible*, 2357)

²⁸ “Leaving people’s bodies out for public display was a way to dishonor them after their death.” (*Illustrated Study Bible*, 2357)

²⁹ “The period of 3 ½ days contrasts with the much longer 3 ½ years of their prophetic ministry and recalls Jesus’ three days in the grave.” (Duvall, 159)

³⁰ “The language of this verse follows the vision recorded in Ezekiel 37 in which God sends the breath of life into the dry bones, which come to life and stand upon their feet.” (Mounce, 228) This is also a reminder that just as Jesus rose from the dead and could not be defeated in death, God will not be defeated in the death of His witnesses. (*Illustrated Study Bible*, 2357)

³¹ Several Old Testament prophecies predicted a great earthquake in the end when God will return to crush His enemies. (**Ezekiel 38:19–20; Isaiah 24:18–20; Joel 2:10**)

³² Whether these amazing and terrifying events brought true repentance or not, “those who survived the earthquake were forced to acknowledge God’s power and sovereignty over the world.” (*Illustrated Study Bible*, 2357)

³³ The flying eagle had warned of three terrors that were associated with the last three trumpets (**Revelation 8:13**). Two terrors had passed and the third is most likely the Battle of Armageddon (**Revelation 11:18**). (Barton, 129)

4. Those who have been measured and found to be part of God’s temple are under His protection. Meanwhile, those in the “outer courtyard” are trampling the holy city and seem to have the upper hand, but they are ultimately vulnerable in a far more terrifying way—they don’t have God’s protection. How does this impact your perspective on those who don’t yet know Christ (those in the “outer courtyard”)?

5. The entire vision of **Revelation 11:1–14** symbolically paints a picture of the Church as witnesses to a world that often brutally resists the message of God. Read the following descriptions of God’s witnesses:

- They are known and protected, having been measured and counted. (**Revelation 11:1**)
- They have been given power to be witnesses. (**Revelation 11:3, 6**)
- They are clothed in burlap, living in repentance and calling others to the same. (**Revelation 11:3**)
- They stand before the Lord of all the earth. (**Revelation 11:4**)
- God knows when their testimony on earth will be completed. (**Revelation 11:7**)
- The people who oppose God will despise them and celebrate their apparent demise. (**Revelation 11:10**)
- Death will not defeat them, but God will breathe life into them. (**Revelation 11:11**)
- They will be called to “come up” to God. (**Revelation 11:12**)

You are one of God’s witnesses. From this list, what stands out to you? Why?

6. The world celebrated the death of the two witnesses. While being part of God's Temple offers us spiritual protection, Jesus assured His followers that following Him would also expose them to the hatred of the world.

"If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first...Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you...But I will send you the Advocate—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me. And you also must testify about me..."

Excerpts from **John 15:18–27**

Despite the hatred and persecution we will likely face because we are followers of God, God promised that His Spirit would help us testify about Jesus to the world around us. Describe your perspective on the possibility of facing hatred as you act as a witness to the world around you.

We are overcomers with Christ because we persist in our faith and witness. How does this truth inspire you?



WORSHIP

Take a moment to enter into a time of worship—both on your own and with your community—to show praise, adoration and love for God.

As much as these chapters of Revelation paint a picture of the Church, they also paint a picture of God and His plan. Read through these words that describe God and His plan as pictured in this passage. Underline a few that are especially important to you.

God is immense (**10:1–3**)

God is responsive (**10:3**)

God is present (**10:1**)

God and His plan are eternal (**10:6**)

God is Creator (**10:7**)

God is sovereign (**10:7; 11:7**)

His plan is mysterious (**10:7**)

His plan is sweet (**10:9**)

God is empowering (**11:3–6**)

God is protective (**11:5**)

God and His plan are life-giving (**11:11**)

God and His plan are terrifying (**11:11–13**)

Offer God prayers of praise, adoration and thanksgiving for who He is and for His good plan for humanity.



WITNESS

Believers are called to reflect Christ in the world. This section will help you engage with how to be a witness—reflecting Christ—this week.

The word “witness” is language used in the courtroom, implying someone is on trial. Consider this quote:

“Who is on trial?... Jesus is on trial! Why? For claiming to bring into the world another kingdom, which transforms and displaces all other kingdoms. For subverting the status quo. For claiming to be able to repair broken humanity. For claiming to be able to set humanity free from the powers of evil and sin and death. For claiming to be the center of all things ... Jesus calls the temple, his people, to be his witnesses, to give evidence that he is right.”³⁴

What evidence can you offer the world that Jesus is who He says He is?

Share your insight with a friend, and also ask God for an opportunity to share that evidence with someone who may not yet have any reason to believe.

³⁴ Johnson, 209

