

When God Is on the Throne: Discovering the Mysteries of Revelation
Study Guide on Revelation 10-11—Week 7 (Sunday, Oct. 18)

Background: Both of the visions for this week's discussion draw heavily from the Old Testament, and the reader who is familiar with those passages will better understand John's message.

Text: As happened after the opening of the sixth seal, there is now an interlude after the sixth trumpet. And just as before, the interlude consists of two visions: the angel with the little scroll (chap. 10) and the two witnesses (chap. 11). The interlude not only builds the dramatic tension, it also offers reassurance to the faithful that they will be protected and describes what their role will be during the coming distress.

It is unclear why John hears seven thunders but is immediately forbidden to write down their contents (10:1-4). Perhaps the point is that there are aspects of God's plan that He will not reveal (compare Mark 13:32). The angel who swears by God that there will be no more delay reminds the reader of Daniel 12:5-10, where a messenger of God similarly swears that God's people would suffer for only a short time longer (3½ years). The second part of this vision seems strange to readers, until they remember that Ezekiel was also instructed to take a scroll and eat it (Ezekiel 2:1-3:3), and Jeremiah also ate God's words (Jeremiah 15:16). John's eating the scroll symbolizes his role as the one who will play the role of a prophet, both in its sweet and bitter aspects.

The second vision (chap. 11) has John measuring the temple and counting the worshipers but excluding the court of the Gentiles and its worshipers. (The church as the temple of God is a very common theme in the NT.) The reason given is that the Gentiles will trample Jerusalem for 42 months. During this time two witnesses, the number needed in the Old Testament to convict anyone of a capital crime, prophesy against the enemies of God. They are described in terms of faithful men of God: first as olive trees and lampstands (Joshua and Zerubbabel from Zechariah 4) and then in terms of Moses and Elijah, through whom the waters in Egypt were turned to blood and no rain fell for 3½ years. These witnesses are finally killed by the beast from the Abyss, and their bodies are left on the streets. After their resurrection 3½ days later, they are taken to heaven. An earthquake in the great city then causes the city to begin to collapse and seven thousand people to perish. This vision is apparently another reminder to John's readers that God's people (represented by the temple, its worshipers, and the two witnesses) must remain faithful even to the point of death. However, the tribulation will not last long (3½ years): God will resurrect and reward his people, and he will punish his enemies.

When the seventh angel finally blows his trumpet, those in heaven worship God. The vision of the ark of the covenant in the temple in heaven is probably another reminder that God is faithful to his covenant.

It would appear that the end has actually come. God has punished his enemies and rewarded faithful Christians. This apparently suggests that what will follow in the book of Revelation is a more detailed description of what has already been envisioned. (That is, it will largely be recapitulation until the final chapters.) The persecuted Christians of John's day have been allowed to see the glorious future.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the visions of John include rainbows, clouds, and fiery pillars (10:1-2)? What do these images represent in the Old Testament? Are there images that represent the same things for us?
2. One possible reason for John's being forbidden to write about the seven thunders is that God does not reveal all of his plans. How does that square with your understanding of God's will? Can you think of other reasons John may have been told not to write it down?
3. What do you think it means when the mighty angel swears by God that, "There will be no more delay"?
4. Why was the scroll sweet in John's mouth but sour in his stomach? Do the words of God ever function that way for you?
5. Why does the vision portray the faithful witnesses in terms of Moses and Elijah? How did they behave in difficult times? How does the way they are treated remind us of the way Jesus was treated in chapter 11, and how does the mention of Sodom and Egypt add to the meaning?
6. What might it mean that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and that God has begun to reign (11:15, 17)?
7. What does it mean for us to be witnesses for God? Are we to be like prophets, or are there other ways to be faithful witnesses?