

# IN RESPONSE - THE BITTER-SWEET GOSPEL (Revelation 10:1-11)

by Dennis Prutow

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Revelation more or less reviews the present age seven times. The first section includes chapters 1-3. We began with section two, chapters 4-7. We saw the throne of God, the Lion of the tribe of Judah and Lamb that was slain yet lives, and the opening the great scroll with seven seals. We presently view the third section, chapters 8-11. Chapter 10 answers the warning blasts of the trumpets. Six trumpets have sounded. The warnings of God mount. Trumpet seven is yet to come. In the interim, John says,

I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire (Revelation 10:1).

This messenger looks much like the Son of Man. Compare Revelation 1:13-15. However, Revelation does not portray Christ as an angel. This is a messenger of Christ, a strong angel. Another strong angel sought someone to open the book of seven seals (Revelation 5:2). A strong angel will also execute God's judgment against Babylon (Revelation 18:21). The rainbow reminds us of God's covenant not to ever again destroy the earth with a flood (Genesis 9:11). This angel is a messenger bearing the good news of God's covenant.

"And he had in his hand a little book which was open. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land" (verse 2). This little book contrasts with the great book of chapter 5. The former is the book of God's decrees. The little book is the Word of God, specifically the gospel. This little book reminds us of Ezekiel 2:8-3:3 where God gives the prophet a scroll to eat and tells Ezekiel to prophesy. We therefore take this little book to be the Word of God. This little book is open. The gospel is available to all who will listen. God's decrees are hidden.

That the angel stands on the land and on the sea indicates both his stature and his authority. He is a mighty, a strong, angel. His authority is pervasive, covering all the earth. The gospel goes forth to every tribe, tongue, people and nation.

"And he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars; and when he had

cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices" (verse 3). The loud voice accentuates the authority of the angel. The voice is a voice of a lion, The Lion of the Tribe of Judah. This is the message of Jesus Christ. He represents Christ and the gospel of Christ. Immediately, thunder rumbles. There is clarity in revelation and there is obscurity. When the elect hear the voice of The Lion through His representatives, they hear the Word of God. It is quite the opposite for those outside of Christ as indicated in verse 4.

When the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken and do not write them."

Some men and women hear the Word clearly. To others it is just noise. John understood the seven peals of thunder as perhaps the perfect judgments of God. The reprobate fail to properly understand the Word of God, the thunder from heaven. When Jesus was close to His death He cried to God, "'Father, glorify Your name.' Then a voice came out of heaven: 'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again'" (John 12:28). How did the multitudes perceive the voice of the Father? "So the crowd of people who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered" (John 12:29). They hear the sound but they do not recognize the voice of God. The company of Paul experienced a similar thing on the road to Damascus. "The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice [sound, NASV margin] but seeing no one" (Acts 9:7). Paul explains in Acts 22:9, "And those who were with me saw the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me." This is the meaning of verse 4. God discloses he things of salvation to some and hides them from others. Jesus gives thanks for this. "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants (Matthew 11:25).

Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted

up his right hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that there will be delay no longer, but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets (verses 5-7).

There is no real delay in working out the purposes of God. The gospel in all its glory is going forth and covering the earth. The judgments of God are coming to completion. The seventh trumpet will sound. Before this, time will be filled with the events determined before the foundation of the world. When these vents unfold, the mysteries of God are revealed. These mysteries are now locked in the words of the prophets.

What must John do? Verses 8-10.

Then the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard again speaking with me, and saying, "Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land." So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, "Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.

First, John must ingest the Word of God. It must become His life. This Word of the gospel is sweet. It is a Word bringing life. The Word of the gospel can also be very bitter. It spells eternal judgment for those who reject the Savior.

Second, John must preach the message of sweetness, the life of the gospel, and the message of bitterness, life without the Christ of the gospel. God also charges us with nothing less. "And they said to me, 'You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings'" (verse 11).

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## IN RESPONSE - IMAGES OF THE CHURCH (Revelation 11:1-8)

by Dennis Prutow

After John's commission to preach the bitter-sweet gospel, and ours, we have two visions of the church.

Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, "Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it" (Revelation 11:1).

The temple is the church. We are dealing with symbols. The symbol portrays the reality. The temple is a regular picture and type of the church. Ephesians 2:20-22 and 1 Peter 2:4-5. John is given a measuring rod with which to inspect the integrity of the temple. The standard given to us with which to measure the church, and those in it, is the Bible, the Word of God. This is our inerrant *rule* for faith and life. Who gave the measuring rod to John and who gave the directions is not said. We have no difficulty inferring this is divine command. Verse 2,

Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months.

The court outside the temple is the court of the gentiles. This was, during the time of Jesus, Paul and John the court into which gentiles might enter. Beyond this point they could go only on pain of death. This outer court and the inner court taken together were the visible temple of God. This is the picture.

It tells us the church of Christ is a mixed multitude. Within the pale of the church reside those who have been born again. There are also those who only profess Christ outwardly or who are antagonistic to Christ yet align themselves with a Christian church.

Those who are born again take the rule of God's word seriously and measure their lives by it. Those who are not born again pay lip service to the Word. Within they are hostile. We *see* only the outside of the temple. We *know* it contains two courts. We cannot readily distinguish between these two courts in this life. The vision reveals the problem. Jesus expounds the same truth in the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13:24-30.

We have a second image of the church beginning in verses 3-4.

And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

The text takes us to Zechariah 4:11-14.

Then I said to him, "What are these two olive trees on the right of the lampstand and on its left?" And I answered the second time and said to him, "What are the two olive branches which are beside the two golden pipes, which empty the golden oil from themselves?" So he answered me, saying, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." Then he said, "These are the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth."

The scene is the rebuilding of the temple after the Babylonian captivity. Zerubabel, the governor of Judah, and Joshua, the high priest, led the way. God anointed them to rebuild His temple. They accomplished their work by the power of the Spirit (Zechariah 4:6, Haggai 2:4). This pictures the work of the church.

Our text images the witnessing church. Why two witnesses? "By the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed" (Matthew 18:16). In this context, Jesus makes a startling revelation about Himself and His disciples. About himself: "While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world" (John 9:5). What happens when He leaves this earth? Jesus says to us: "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). The *witnessing* church, powered by the Spirit, is the light of the world. This church will encounter persecution.

Verses 5-6 portray persecution.

And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.

Those who turn against the witnessing church feel the heat of the Word of judgment. When views of perdition fail to warn and heaven fails to woo, there is eternal death. There is a sense in which the power of life and the sentence of judgment is in the hands of the church. This is truly awesome. Compare Psalm 149:5-9 and the words of Jesus.

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:19).

Only in God's time does the testimony of the church wane, verses 7-8.

When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified

Seeming death comes. Revival follows. Pentecost followed the rejection of the long expected Messiah. The Reformation followed the Dark Ages. The Great Awakening threw light on an enlightened but darkened age. We live in new dark ages. Yet the witnessing church cannot be extinguished. Revival is inevitable.

Verse 7 portends Armageddon. See Revelation 16:13-16. The spirit of Babylon, the great city (Revelation 17:18), sometimes manifested in Sodom and Egypt, is doomed. Jerusalem of old succumbed to the spirit of Babylon. The modern church surely has done so also. The heirs of the Calvinistic congregationalism in New England ordain homosexuals. Presbyterians are leaning in the same direction. This is death in the broad church, the outer court of the gentiles. The remnant, the inner court, the church supplied by the spirit, remains. The beast from the abyss cannot extinguish the true witness of Christ in the church.

For an explanation of the forty-two months and twelve hundred and sixty days, see comments on Revelation 12:14. 'In Response' is published by the Sterling Pulpit, Post Office Box 303, Sterling, KS 67579-0303. Copyright © 1996 by Dennis Prutow.

# IN RESPONSE - IMAGES OF THE WORLD (Revelation 11:9-14)

by Dennis Prutow

The Word of God, the gospel, is the only answer to the warning trumpets of God to repent. Revelation 10. We must repent and believe the gospel. The church proclaims the gospel and is measured by the gospel. Revelation 11:1-8. Now we clearly see the reaction of the world to the church and to the proclamation of the Word of God. The broad church, the outer court of the temple, "dies." When the church seems to perish, when the witness of the church becomes dim, the world rejoices.

Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb (verse 9).

Those from the peoples, tribes, tongues and nations are representatives of the unbelieving world. It is the dead bodies of the two witnesses which are exposed for three and one half days. The witness of the church appears dead. Yet the true temple of God lives.

That these people do not allow the bodies to be buried indicates their brutality and vile hatred of the church. However, the three and one half days reminds us of Lazarus. When Jesus approached the tomb, John 11:39 relates, "Jesus said, 'Remove the stone.' Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, 'Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days.'" The three and one half days in Revelation 11:9 indicates the two witnesses do not cause the stench expected by those hate them. Verse 10.

And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

The earth represents the *world*, that spiritual system led by Satan and opposed to Christ. When the witness of the church falls silent, the world cheers. The torment to those who dwell on the earth is a torment of conscience. When the church is silent, the conscience of the world is not a bother.

Revival comes to the church through the Spirit of God. Verse 11.

But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet;

and great fear fell upon those who were watching them.

The days of relative weakness in witness pass. They are short. New life enters the church. The dry bones rattle and rise from the dust of the grave. The puritans, especially, believed in and prayed for times of revival. When death seemed to overtake the church, they sought God for refreshment from on high. We too need similar times of awakening and revival.

One of the evidences of spiritual awakening is fear. Individuals come to see their eternal peril because of sin. They grasp the reality of hell as a just payment for their sins. They dread the judgment of God. Their only recourse is to seek His face for mercy in forgiveness.

This fear promotes a seeking after God. It is, to be sure, a seeking based upon self interest. The desire is the preservation of life. In this context, what do we do with Romans 3:11? "There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God." The standard approach is that no person seeks God if not born again. Is this true? My response is that no person seeks God if not impelled to do so by God. External pressure may be exerted in many ways to constrain persons to seek God. This is the burden of Psalm 83:13-16. Here is a prayer crying to God to bring the fear of God upon sinners.

O my God, make them like the whirling dust, like chaff before the wind. Like fire that burns the forest and like a flame that sets the mountains on fire, so pursue them with Your tempest and terrify them with Your storm. Fill their faces with dishonor, *that they may seek Your name, O Lord* (italics added).

God's whole purpose in warning sinners is that they would repent. Here God uses His power to order creation to bring fear to the hearts of sinners and constrain them to seek His face. They would naturally not do this. Fear instilled by God is design to constrain them to seek Him.

This is actually merciful and gracious of God. Were God to withdraw even His common grace, sinners would have no qualms of conscience regarding their lives or eternity. The application of common grace in engendering fear is an act of mercy. Verse 12 continues.

And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them.

Remember, this is a vision symbolizing truth. In the vision there is ascension from earth to heaven. This is a picture of Colossians 1:13. "He [God] rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son." The visible church rises to new life. People change before a watching world. This too engenders fear in the heart of people who know they need to be different else they are doomed.

The voice calling forth new life is that of God. God brings about this new life in a sovereign way as He causes people to seek His face. They seek God by placing themselves under the hearing of His Word. This brings them in contact with the means of salvation, the means of grace. "For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1:23).

In the interim, a watching world must brace for judgment.

And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven (verse 13).

The city is likely Jerusalem, earlier referred to as Sodom and Egypt (verse 8), a microcosm of unbelief. It represents the Christ rejecting world. When the sixth trumpet sounds its warning (Revelation 9:13ff.), the world floods the church. This is an earthquake. God extracts His tithe. The seven thousand refers to spiritual death coming to those doomed to that state (1 Peter 2:8). This too is a cause for fear. It is a call to repentance (Revelation 9:20-21). Some give glory to God out of hearts filled with love for Him. Others give Him glory from perdition. "The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly" (verse 14).

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# IN RESPONSE - THE HALLELUJAH CHORUS (Revelation 11:15-19)

by Dennis Prutow

We conclude this third section of Revelation, chapters 8-11. The sixth warning trumpet sounded (Revelation 9:13), the second woe is past and the third woe is coming upon those who refuse to repent and turn in faith to Christ as Lord and Savior. As in previous cases, the third woe and the seventh trumpet are synonymous. Revelation 11:15,

Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."

This powerful text stands behind "The Hallelujah Chorus" in Handel's *Messiah*. The choir here involves all those gathered around the throne of God. There are the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, myriads of angels and a multitude of glorified saints.

The domain of the devil is no longer the world. The gospel's victory is complete. The first horseman of the four horsemen of the apocalypse has completed his task. "He went out conquering to conquer" (Revelation 6:2). Christ reigns. This is the announcement at the end of the age.

Verse 16 begins the response to this grand declaration. "And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshipped God." Why worship God? His plans and purposes are brought to consummation. The song of the elders begins in verse 17,

We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. God, not the universe, is eternal. God, not man, is almighty. He is the ruler of the universe. In what sense does God *begin His reign* at the consummation? At present, Christ reigns as mediator. He is bringing all His and our enemies under the sway of His power. "Then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power" (1 Corinthians 15:24). First Corinthians 15:28 then says,

When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected

all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.

God is to be and will be all in all.

The song continues.

And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth (verse 18).

In the end, God will balance the scales of justice. Let the nations rage. God laughs. See Psalm 2:1-4. The nations are the unbelieving world. God's wrath justly punishes their rebellion, sin, idolatry, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, thievery, etc., etc., etc.

The dead are the dead in sin, the dead spiritually. They receive wrath, justly. The bond-servants of God love Christ. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7). "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). God brings such fear *upon* unbelievers in His providential dealings with them. Many reject this fear. Some grasp it and seek God's face. This is common grace. Special grace, applied to the elect, brings reverence before God and Christ into the hearts of the elect.

The earth is the sphere of the devil. It is composed of people ruled by that spiritual kingdom. They oppose to God. Those who destroy the earth are leaders who degrade Christ and direct men and women away from Christ. Such men and women find they have heaped up wrath for the day of wrath.

Because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God (Romans 2:5). In the song of the elders, that day has come. The elders give thanks for the awesome and awful judgments of God.

The scene shifts to the inner precincts of heaven in verse 19.

And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

The temple we now see is the prototype. "For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself" (Hebrews 9:24). The earthly temple was a type and picture of the heavenly. The true temple is in heaven. When the veil of the earthly temple was torn from top to bottom, this indicated Christ opened the true temple in heaven. Those who trust in the sacrifice of Christ as the only adequate payment for their sins have access into God's throne room.

There we find the ark of the covenant. In this box we see "a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant" (Hebrews 9:4). Each of these items reminds us of sin and blessing. The manna reminds us of how God's people often grumble about God's provision. It also symbolizes the life of Christ. He is the true bread which came down from heaven (John 6:33). Aaron's rod reminds us of how God's people often grumble against their leaders. It also reminds us God is the one who sovereignly chooses us and our leaders (Numbers 17:5). The tablets of stone were those tablets upon which God Himself inscribed the Ten Commandments with His own finger (Exodus 31:18, Deuteronomy 9:10). The Ten Commandments remind us of our sins against God and the righteousness of Christ imputed to us by faith. We receive bread from heaven; God has chosen us; the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us. This is our access into the inner sanctuary of God. Hallelujah!

The flashes of lightning, thunder and hail are a salute to the power of God. The images point to the judgments of God. Viewed from within the sanctuary this is a display of "the solemn salvos, so to speak, of the artillery of heaven, with which each series of visions is concluded" (Alford). All heaven salutes the Sovereign God and worships His Majesty. Thus Revelation once again brings us to the end of time. We review the same terrain again in Revelation 12-14 from different perspectives.

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