

The Strong Angel's Little Scroll
A Series on the Function of Revelation's Interludes: Part 2

Midway through the book of Revelation, between the sixth and seventh trumpet, there is a periscope involving a strong angel with a little scroll. In this second interlude (Rev 10:1-11:14), the apostle John observes a "strong" angel coming down from heaven described in the following manner: a) clothed with a cloud, b) a rainbow upon his head, c) face like the sun, d) his right foot on the sea and his left on the earth, and e) when he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices, which John was instructed, by someone in heaven, not to record.

The apostle observes the strong angel lifting his right hand to heaven and, in swearing by the Maker of heaven, earth, and sea, did not take God's name in vain (Ex 20:7; Deut 5:11). Making a solemn statement, the strong angel was affirming that when the seventh trumpet sounds, the mystery of God is finished and no longer a mystery. Good news for God's prophets!

The mystery of God that the strong angel was referring to is revealed in the next chapter, chapter 11 of Revelation:

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." (Rev 11:15, LSB)

The mystery of God appears to be that the kingdom of the world becomes the Kingdom of God belonging to, not only to God the Father, but to His Son as well.

There is an allusion to this idea elsewhere in the New Testament.

And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the **mystery of the kingdom of God**, but to those who are outside, everything comes in parables, (Mark 4:11, LSB)

1) For I want you to understand how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not seen my face in the flesh, 2) so that their hearts may be encouraged, having been held together in love, even unto all the wealth of the full assurance of understanding, unto **the full knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself**, (Col 2:1-2, LSB)

The New Testament introduced the phrase "Kingdom of God."

The Kingdom is Inaugurated: With the birth of Jesus, the angel Gabriel signals the inauguration of the Kingdom of God by explicitly linking the birth to the covenant God made with David (Luke 1:31-33). Jesus will receive the throne of David, reign over the house of Jacob and His rule will be everlasting. The unconditional promise of a King begins the process of being fulfilled.

The Kingdom is Near: After John was put in prison, Jesus began His public ministry and announced the coming Kingdom of God to Israel, "The time **is** fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God **is** at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15 also Matt 3:2; 4:17).

Jesus introduces the idea that the Kingdom of God is exclusively associated with salvation through Christ. To enter the Kingdom, one must be "reborn" (John 3:1-21).

The Kingdom of God that Jesus presents appears to be intimately associated with Jesus Himself. Faith in the Messiah is integral to the Kingdom and here the verdict that will be passed on to a person in final judgment was determined by the attitude that he adopted towards Jesus at that present moment (Matt 11:20-24; Luke 10:2-16).

The Kingdom is Here: While Jesus speaks of the nearness of the Kingdom of God, there are instances where He says that the Kingdom is here especially when speaking to Jewish religious authorities!

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As Jesus' ministry grows, Jewish religious authorities increasingly object to Jesus' portrayal of Himself as the Messiah, Son of David. Opposition becomes rejection when, after healing the demon possessed deaf mute, Jesus is accused of using demonic power. Jesus responds, "If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God **has** come upon you." (Matt 12:22-28; Luke 11:14-20).

The Kingdom is Yet Future: While there is an intimacy of the Kingdom of God to His Person, Jesus reveals to the disciples that the Kingdom of God is ushered in suddenly and without warning with the return of the Son of Man (Mark 13:1-37; 14:62; Luke 17:22-37). The arrival of the Kingdom will be unexpected and apocalyptic.

The sudden arrival of the Kingdom of God is portrayed by images of the sudden onset of the catastrophic Flood (Matt 24:37-39; Luke 17:26-27), the sudden destruction of Sodom (Luke 17:28-33), the unexpected burglar (Matt 24:42-44; Luke 12:39-40), the sudden arrival of the homeowner (Matt 24:45-51; Luke 12:35-48), or the sudden arrival of the bridegroom (Matt 25:1-13).

The Kingdom is Realized: At this moment, just before the Seventh Trumpet sounds, the Kingdom of God is about to be realized, and the mystery of God will be understood.

Next, the apostle John hears a voice from heaven that instructs the apostle to take the little scroll that is open from the strong angel and eat it:

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. And they said to me, "You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings." (Rev 10:8-11)

While the idea of literally eating a small scroll may be hard to understand, an incident like this occurred earlier with the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel, and it provides some clarity to the command given to the apostle John.

Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you." Then I looked, and behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll was in it. When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back, and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe. Then He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. He said to me, "Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you." Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth. Then He said to me, "Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them. For you are not being sent to a people of unintelligible speech or difficult language, but to the house of Israel, nor to many peoples of unintelligible speech or difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. But I have sent you to them who should listen to you; yet the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, since they are not willing to listen to Me. Surely the whole house of Israel is stubborn and obstinate. (Ezek 2:8-3:7)

Several observations can be made of this passage in Ezekiel:

The scroll was full of lamentations, mourning and woe (Ezek 2:10).

Just as Ezekiel was told to "eat this scroll" and "speak to the house of Israel," the apostle John was told to "eat it" and "prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings" (Ezek 3:1; Rev 10:10-11).

Just like Ezekiel, the apostle John found the taste of the scroll "sweet as honey" (Ezek:3:3; Rev 10:9).

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God's instruction of eating was intended to fill Ezekiel's "body with this scroll," and the ingested scroll enabled Ezekiel to prophesy in a manner that all would understand (Ezek 3:3-6). From this point on, at age 30 (Ezek 1:1), Ezekiel becomes a prophet of God.

Here an important observation must be made. Up until this point, the apostle John was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day," and he was instructed to "write in a book" what he saw, "and send it to the seven churches" (Rev 1:10-11).

However, by eating the strong angel's scroll, he was given prophetic material that was additional to what saw while he "in the Spirit on the Lord's day." This material was so important that he "must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings" (Rev 10:11). In other words, this prophesy was intended for the whole world beyond the seven churches!

The change in prophetic content is immediate; the apostle John is instructed to see and **feel** what he is being shown; he is to "measure the temple of God and the altar" (Rev 11:1). During this tribulation period of trumpets, Jerusalem will apparently have a temple of God; however, at this time, Gentiles will be inappropriately "treading" or "trampling" around its outer court for 3-1/2 years (Rev 11:2).

Like the first interlude, this second interlude introduces another group of human beings: the Two Witnesses.

The Two Witnesses appear clothed in sackcloth and are prophesying to the world for a period of 3-1/2 years. As His witnesses, God will grant them the authority to:

Kill any who attempt to harm them by fire that flows from their mouths (Rev 11:5).

Have the power to stop the rain while they are prophesying (Rev 11:6).

Have the power to turn water into blood (Rev 11:6)

Have the power to invoke every plague known to man (i.e. diseases, the plagues of Exodus, etc.) upon the earth as often as they desire (Rev 11:6).

To God, the Two Witnesses are figuratively seen as "two olive trees" and "two lampstands that stand before the Lord on earth" (Rev 11:4). This precise imagery was used before during the restoration of the Second Temple for Joshua the priest and Zerubbabel the governor of Judah:

The two olive trees represent two anointed servants of God who stand before the Lord on earth.

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.**" (Zech 4:11-14)

The two lampstands represent what is behind the Two Witnesses, "not by might nor by power, but by God's spirit."

Then the angel who was speaking with me returned and roused me, as a man who is awakened from his sleep. He said to me, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see, and behold, a **lampstand** all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, and its seven lamps on it with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps which are on the top of it; also two olive trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on its left side." Then I said... (continues)

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to the angel who was speaking with me saying, "What are these, my lord?" So the angel who was speaking with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." Then he said to me, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel saying, '**Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts.**'" (Zech 4:1-6)

After their period of prophetic testimony, the "Beast from the Abyss" will make war and kill the Two Witnesses (Rev 11:7). The identity of the "Beast from the Abyss" poses a problem. The only beasts that the book of Revelation mentions is one from the sea (Rev 13:1) and one from the earth (Rev 13:11), both of whom are introduced in the third interlude. From the bottomless pit called the abyss is the fallen angel king of the abyss named Abaddon (Hebrew) / Apollyon (Greek) who was released when the fifth trumpet sounded signaling an unfallen angel to use a key to open the abyss (Rev 9:1-2, 11-12). It is very likely that it is this fallen angel who slays the Two Witnesses.

The bodies of the Two Witnesses will be on a street in Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified (Rev 11:8), which would be in the vicinity of the present day Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

Their bodies will be left out for public viewing for 3-1/2 days (Rev 11:9-10), in which people worldwide will rejoice and celebrate, because there will be no more prophetic indictments nor harmful spectacular natural events and plagues.

With an audible voice from heaven, the world will see a visible resuscitation and physical ascension of the Two Witnesses and followed by an earthquake that destroys 1/10 of Jerusalem and kills seven thousand. This produces great fear among the people, and many will praise God (Rev 11:11-13). What is uncertain is how many will come to a genuine faith in God.

It is significant to note that the death of the Two Witnesses marks the end of the second woe and associates the end of the Two Witnesses sometime after the sixth trumpet (Rev 11:13-14). The second woe encompassed the release of the four bound fallen angels of the Euphrates (Rev 9:13) to the resuscitation and ascension of the Two Witnesses.

The Two Witnesses are reminiscent of the Old Testament prophet Moses who had the ability to invoke supernatural wonders and spectacular natural events to demonstrate to the world the reality of the God of the Hebrews.

God gave Moses a staff with which to perform the spectacular signs (Ex 4:17).

The signs were to validate his authority as God's spokesman to both the Hebrews and Pharaoh (Ex 4:15-16; 7:1-3).

And instead of recognizing the sovereignty of the God of the Hebrews, Pharaoh's heart was hardened.

The second interlude is significant for introducing time and the Two Witnesses. This facilitates a hermeneutic correlation with Daniel's 70th week prophecy and God's judgment in Revelation, which is examined in the article "How does Daniel's 70th week correspond to Revelation?" (<http://Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/12End/DanielRevelation.aspx>)