

THE SEVEN THUNDERS

At the opening of this chapter we are introduced to an “angel” messenger who is no less a personage than Jesus Christ Himself.¹

“And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire.” Revelation 10:1.

There was a rainbow encircling the throne where the Father and the Lamb sat in the heavenly sanctuary (Rev. 4:3). Whenever God sees the rainbow He remembers His everlasting covenant. It is His promise to minister mercy with His justice to the children of men.

Christ announces His message after August 11, 1840. The exact fulfillment of the prophecy of the downfall of the Ottoman Empire on that date greatly strengthened the faith of those who were interested in the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

¹ “The mighty angel who instructed John was no less a personage than Jesus Christ. Setting His right foot on the sea, and His left upon the dry land, shows the part which He is acting in the closing scenes of the great controversy with Satan. This position denotes His supreme power and authority over the whole earth. The controversy had waxed stronger and more determined from age to age, and will continue to do so, to the concluding scenes when the masterly working of the powers of darkness shall reach their height. Satan, united with evil men, will deceive the whole world and the churches who receive not the love of the truth. But the mighty angel demands attention. He cries with a loud voice. He is to show the power and authority of His voice to those who have united with Satan to oppose the truth.” {7BC 971.3}

“And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth.” Revelation 10:2.

With his right foot upon the sea and his left foot upon the earth Christ has a message for the world, based on the teachings of “a little book” which John especially notices is now “open.” What book can this be? An angel long before had told the prophet Daniel to “shut up the words, and seal the book” which he had written, “until the time of the end” (Dan. 12:4).

We ask, when did the “time of the end” come? The answer is: at the close of the Dark Ages of persecution. Daniel writes: “Some of these of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end” (Dan. 11:35). This time of persecution was enforced by the apostate church or churches during the 1260 years of papal supremacy, which period ended in A. D. 1798 (Rev. 12:6, 14; 13:5). The “little book” which was opened after 1798 was the Book of Daniel. It suddenly captured the attention of Christians everywhere.

Students of Bible prophecy discovered that they were living in “the time of the end,” and that the coming of Jesus was near at hand. The message was proclaimed on “sea and land,” with a “loud voice,

as when a lion roars” (Rev. 10:3). The attention of the world was arrested, and people everywhere listened in amazement to the message that Jesus was coming soon, possibly even in their lifetime. Great tents were purchased which were pitched in city after city, where hundreds and thousands gathered to hear the solemn message from the Book of Daniel that the 2,300 year prophecy of Daniel 8:14 was to be fulfilled in 1844. Not since the days of the apostles had the Holy Spirit worked so mightily in turning thousands to repentance.

William Miller preached the message with power. Men even sold their farms and houses to obtain money with which to print tracts and books to circulate the message. Youth and little children were converted. This was the time of the “Philadelphia church.”

“And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices. And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.” Revelation 10:3, 4.

But there was something mysterious which God's people were not to understand completely at that time. What the seven thunders uttered, John was not to write. The church was to learn it only by experience. A test of their faith was involved.² The things uttered by the seven thunders, which John was commanded to seal up, or render obscure, were, doubtless, those features of the prophecy which Mr. Miller did not comprehend, and which, if properly understood, would have averted the disappointment which he and his friends experienced. In other words, the passage that relates to the seven thunders indicates that a mystery would characterize the proclamation of those who were to do the work attributed to the rainbow angel, answering precisely to that which marked the '44 movement.

“And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are,

² “The special light given to John which was expressed in the seven thunders was a delineation of events which would transpire under the first and second angels' messages. It was not best for the people to know these things, for their faith must necessarily be tested. In the order of God most wonderful and advanced truths would be proclaimed. The first and second angels' messages were to be proclaimed, but no further light was to be revealed before these messages had done their specific work. This is represented by the angel standing with one foot on the sea, proclaiming with a most solemn oath that time should be no longer.” {7BC 971.6}

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Revelation 10:5, 6.

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“This time, which the angel declares with a solemn oath, is not the end of this world's history, neither of probationary time, but of prophetic time, which should precede the advent of our Lord. That is, the people will not have another message upon definite time. After this period of time, reaching from 1842 to 1844, there can be no definite tracing of the prophetic time. The longest reckoning reaches to the autumn of 1844.” {7BC 971.7}

In Daniel 8:14 we read the prophecy which reveals when time should be no longer. "For two thousand three hundred days, then the sanctuary shall be cleansed." A day in prophecy representing a year, these 2,300 years began in 457 B. C., and ended in A. D. 1844.

It was this prophecy which a few years before 1844 was opened to the understanding of many Bible students in different parts of the world. The amazing fulfillment of the prophecy concerning the Turkish Empire on August 11, 1840 gave great impetus to the preaching, and convinced thousands of its truthfulness.

There can be no measured prophetic time after the close of the 2300 year prophecy. From then on, the end is always imminent, its time dependent on the preparation of God's people.

"But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets." Revelation 10:7.

This is the 1888 message of righteousness by faith. Shortly after the judgment hour message of 1844 God gave the loud cry message of Christ our righteousness. The truth of justification by faith is to be seen in the light of the sanctuary message. It is Christ's work

of completing the atonement in His bride to be that they may be prepared for His coming.

God's plan was that as soon as the announcement was made that there should be time no longer (1844) then "the mystery of God should be finished." In other words, "the seventh angel" began to sound on October 22, 1844. The connection between the time prophecy and the ending of the plan of salvation were placed together by Christ.³

There is a direct line of connection between the "mighty angel" and the seventh angel and the Third Angels' Message. In studying the seven trumpets we are seeing the foundation for the Third Angels' Message. "Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Revelation 14:12. The gospel plan of salvation is the commandments of God in the faith of Jesus. Christ is the goal of the law. He who has Christ must have the law of God. The faith of

³ "I feel an intense interest that all should comprehend, as far as possible, the love of God. We cannot afford to draw away our attention from this subject, for in it is contained the mystery of God,—the plan of salvation. We may put to the stretch every power of our mind, and yet we shall not be fully able to comprehend the heights and depths of the love of God; for the human mind is not capable of understanding its full significance. It is our privilege, however, to obtain clearer and more distinct views of the plan of salvation. We should not be content with a superficial knowledge of this wonderful plan, but we should seek to behold it in all its greatness, that as far as possible we may understand the love of God." *ST*, November 18, 1889 par. 3.

Christ will work by love in the believer. This is Christian character perfection.

Paul writes of the mystery of God. "Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Colossians 1:26, 27. Here is connected the thought of Christ perfectly dwelling within Gentiles as a preparation for being glorified at the coming of Christ. This is the completion of Christ's work in the final atonement as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. The atonement is accomplished when believer and Christ are at one.

"And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth." Revelation 10:8.

John is told by heaven's voice to take "the little book" of Daniel. He represents this of the 1844 movement who went through the experience of proclaiming the time message in connection with the judgment hour and Christ's second coming.

“And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey.”
Revelation 10:9.

The angel here is the mighty angel, i.e., Christ, who gives John “the little book” of Daniel. Christ was in the 1844 movement guiding and directing it even though they misunderstood the event that was connected with October 22.

“And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.” Revelation 10:10.

There was something very “bitter” about this experience for the church. John in vision shares it with them. Those who proclaimed that the sanctuary should be cleansed in 1844 understood the time prophecy correctly. There was no mistake in their reckoning of the beginning or the end of the 2,300 years. But they did not understand what is the true meaning of the event, the “cleansing of the sanctuary.” They thought this referred to the second coming of Christ to this earth at the close of human history. They did not know that the true teaching of the sanctuary in heaven, where Christ is our High

Priest. They did not know that “the cleansing of the sanctuary” requires a different phase of the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, as prefigured in the types and symbols of the Old Testament sanctuary.

Of old, the Hebrew high priest entered the typical Most Holy apartment on the Day of Atonement, to “cleanse” the sanctuary. Truly, a most important cosmic event was to take place in 1844; but these sincere people did not understand what that antitypical event was.

To expect the second coming of Jesus and the end of sorrow, sin, and death in 1844 was an experience to the church as “sweet as honey.” These people loved the Lord Jesus, as a bride loves her husband. It was a sweet and joyful thought to them that soon they would be united with their Lord Jesus Himself, nevermore to part from Him.

But Jesus did not come in 1844. Those who loved Jesus were bitterly disappointed, just as the disciples of Christ were disappointed when He was crucified on the cross and buried in the tomb. But this great disappointment included a part of God’s purpose of love for His people.

They soon learned the reason for their disappointment. The “sanctuary” to be “cleansed” is not this earth destroyed by fire, but the sanctuary in heaven where Christ had entered the second apartment to complete the final phase of His work as High Priest.

“And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.” Revelation 10:11.

Then they realized that a worldwide work was yet before them, and that they must “prophesy again” to “many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.”

“And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.” Revelation 11:1.

In the last verse of chapter 10, the angel gave to John, as a representative of the church, a new commission. We have in that verse a prophecy of the third angel’s message. Now follows testimony showing what the nature of that message is to be. It is connected with the temple of God in heaven, and is designed to fit up a class of people as worshipers therein.

The temple here cannot mean the church; for the church is brought to view in connection with this temple as “them that worship

therein.” The temple is therefore the literal temple in heaven, and the worshipers the true church on earth. But these worshipers are not of course to be measured in the sense of ascertaining the height and circumference of each one in feet and inches; they are to be measured as worshipers; hence the measurement has to do with character; and character can be measured only by some standard of right, namely, a law or rule of action. We are thus brought to the conclusion that the ten commandments, the standard which God was given by which to measure “the whole duty of man,” are embraced in the measuring rod put by the angel into the hands of John; and this is the very thing which, in fulfillment of this, has been put, under the third message, into the hands of the church. This is the standard by which the worshipers of God are now to be tested.

What is meant by measuring the temple? How is it to be measured with the measuring rod given to the church? The worshipers in the temple of God are to be measured by the message given to them. The message given them is, “Fear God, and give glory to Him; . . . and worship Him” (Rev. 14:7).

To measure them as worshipers is to measure their reverence for God and their faith in Him. To “fear God” does not mean to be

afraid of Him as we would fear an enemy, but to appreciate His forgiveness of our sins. “There is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared” (Ps. 130:4). To “fear God” is to love Him. Bad people become good not because of terror but because they appreciate what it cost the Lamb of God to forgive their badness. When a person knows he is a sinner, and when he knows his sins are forgiven by the blood of our High Priest who is in the heavenly sanctuary, then he cannot help loving God. A person with such a “faith which works through love” (Gal. 5:6) will “measure up” as a worshiper.

To love God is to keep His commandments, because “love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom. 13:10). John tells us that God’s people see in the heavenly sanctuary “the ark of His covenant” (Rev. 11:19). The law of God, traced in stone by the finger of God, is placed inside that ark as witness that God’s law of love is the foundation of His government.

“But the court which is without the temple, leave out.” As much as to say, The attention of the church is now directed to the inner temple, and the service there. Matters pertaining to the court are of less consequence now. It is given to the Gentiles.

“But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.” Revelation 11:2.

Having thus introduced the Gentiles, the attention of the prophet is directed to the great feature of Gentile apostasy, namely, the treading down of the holy city forty and two months, during the period of papal supremacy. He is then directed to the condition of the word of God, the truth and the church during that time. Thus by an easy and natural transition, we are carried back into the past, and our attention called to a new series of events.

“And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.” Revelation 11:3.

The two time periods mentioned here are obviously one and the same. Counting 30 days to a month, as Bible writers reckoned, the 42 months are the same as the 1260 days of Revelation 12:6, the 42 months of 13:5, and the 3 ½ years or “times” of Daniel 7:25, Daniel 12:7, and Revelation 12:14. Evidently God wants to be sure we understand this time period, or He would not repeat it so often! This is the time of persecution of the church between A. D. 538 to 1798.

During these “Dark Ages” the Bible was not wholly unknown to the people, but it was pretty well hidden and buried beneath a mass of superstition and tradition. The “two witnesses” are understood to be the Old and New Testaments because they bear witness to the truth of God which He miraculously preserved during this time period.

“These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.” Revelation 11:4.

The prophet Zechariah saw how the Bible gives the world its only true light. He saw a vision of two olive trees supplying oil through golden pipes to the golden lamps (Zech. 4:2-6, 11-14). It is the Bible, in the Old and New Testaments, which has supplied light to all the nations. “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” Ps. 119:105.

“And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoreth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.” Revelation 11:5, 6.

During all these past ages of persecution and oppression of the truth, God has not permitted enemies of the gospel completely to destroy His word. In the days of Elijah, the word of the Lord shut the heavens for three and a half years, that no rain should fall; the same word again opened the heavens that rain might come to restore the ruined land. That same word will bring the “seven last plagues” on the earth (Rev. 16), and will finally create a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21).

“And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.” Revelation 11:7, 8.

Who is the “beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit”? In Bible prophecy, a beast is a symbol of a kingdom or a nation. The “bottomless pit” is that place which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, “where also our Lord was crucified.” This is an evil power which does not acknowledge God.

The king of Egypt said, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice? . . . I do not know the Lord” (Exodus 5:2). Here is what we call

atheism, the idea that there is no God. As we view Europe at the close of the 1260 years of the Dark Ages, do we see an atheistic power arise suddenly? History says that France indeed made itself such a nation at that precise time. For the first time in history, a responsible government proclaimed itself atheistic. This was the root whence has come Communist atheism as we know it today. Stalin found his inspiration here.

“And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.” Revelation 11:9, 10.

A frightful revolution overturned the kingdom of France, and directed its bloody energies against what the people had come to suppose was Christianity. This misunderstanding was not really the people's fault, because the popular church in France had misrepresented the religion of Jesus. Losing all patience with the hypocrisy of those who professed to represent God, the revolutionary French government by an act of the legislature abolished the gospel

and the Bible throughout France. They proclaimed that the nation acknowledged no God. Thus the “two witnesses,” the Old and New Testaments, were “slain” throughout France. In one city, the people tied a Bible to the tail of an ass and dragged it through the streets.

At the same time, the legislature formally established fornication by law. The French adopted as a motto, “crush the wretch,” meaning, Christ.

And surely Christ suffered in the person of His saints in France! In one night some years before the Revolution, 50,000 people who believed the Bible and trusted in Christ for eternal salvation were cruelly and treacherously murdered in the St. Bartholomew Massacre. Indeed, France was the place “where also our Lord was crucified.”

This was the spirit of the “bottomless pit.” In the Revolution, Bibles were gathered and burned; the seven-day week was abolished, and every tenth day designated as a day of profane rest. Death was said to be an eternal sleep. A prostitute was called the “goddess of reason,” and publicly worshipped.

Other Christian nations were horrified by what France was doing, and condemned these evil things. Christians of other nations

were aroused to indignation and to prayer. But many worldly people and infidels rejoiced because of this terrible French Revolution. France had silenced the reproving voice of God's two witnesses. The Word of truth lay dead in her streets, and those who hated the restrictions and the requirements of God's law were jubilant. Crowds publicly defied the King of Heaven. There is a lesson here of interest to the world, including modern atheists.

Was France blessed because of its war on the Bible, and its hatred of Christ? Rome had succeeded in persuading the French rulers to persecute and banish the Christians who loved the Bible. An informed writer says: "Century after century, men of principle and integrity, men of intellectual acuteness and moral strength, who had the courage to avow their convictions, and the faith to suffer for the truth—for centuries these men toiled as slaves in the galleys [ships], perished at the stake, or rotted in dungeon cells. Thousands upon thousands found safety in flight; and this continued for two hundred and fifty years after the opening of the Reformation.

"And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them." Revelation 11:11.

The “three days and a half” as prophetic time are three and one half literal years. It is difficult to prove the precise dates during which the “reign of terror” against Bible truth continued, but some have thought it to be from November 1793 to June 1797. Then the government realized what a horrible mistake they had made and religion was again tolerated. Now the “two witnesses” are to be honored:

“And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.” Revelation 11:12.

Whereas Voltaire and other infidels had predicted that the Bible would soon be a forgotten book in all the world, we now see how the Scriptures “ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them.” The Scriptures have indeed been exalted since the French Revolution. In 1804 the British and Foreign Bible Society was organized for the translation and publication of the Scriptures in many languages; in 1816 the American Bible Society was organized for the same purpose; and by now the Bible has been translated into well over 1,000 languages and dialects and is published worldwide.

“And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.” Revelation 11:13.

The “great earthquake,” in which “the tenth of the city fell,” is understood to refer to how the French Revolution cut France’s support of the papacy although France had been the original kingdom which established the political power of the papacy. “When France publicly rejected God and set aside the Bible, wicked men and spirits of darkness exulted in their attainment of the object so long desired—a kingdom free from the restraints of the law of God. . . . But the transgression of a just and righteous law must inevitably result in misery and ruin. . . . Those who had chosen the service of rebellion were left to reap its fruits until the land was filled with crimes too horrible for pen to trace. From devastated provinces and ruined cities a terrible cry was heard, a cry of bitterest anguish. France was shaken as if by God. May God help our governments in our modern world never to forget the lesson of France!