

Revelation 10:8-11 And 11:1-2. The Covenant Angel's Commission



This is the continuation of [The Last Prophecy: An Abridgment of Elliott's Horae Apocalypticae.](#)

Reformation Of The Ministry And Of The Church.

[8] ¶ 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.

[9] 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.

[10] 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.

[11] And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings. (Rev 10:8-11)

[1] ¶ 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.

[2] 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. (Rev 11:1-2)

IN THIS PASSAGE we have prefigured to us the two next great steps of advance in the Reformation: – first, the re-commissioning by Christ of faithful spiritually-prepared ministers to preach his Gospel in various countries and languages; next, the authorized constitution of evangelical and reformed Churches, to the exclusion of the apostate Church of Rome.

[I] The first is contained in the charge to St. John, in his representative character, "to take and eat the little book" which the Angel delivered to him, and so to go forth as the Lord's ambassador and preacher to all people. The word "prophesy," too frequently understood only in its restricted meaning of predicting future events, has properly a far more extended signification. Both in Hebrew and in Greek the term implies to tell forth, announce, speak as an ambassador. Thus it includes the making known God's mind and will, the explanation of his mysteries, the pleading his cause, and, in this, the exhorting, instructing, reproving, warning, and expostulating with a rebellious people. In the New Testament the same meaning is attached to it;

and it is specially applied by St. Paul to the expounding the written Scriptures and exhorting from them. (1 Cor. 14:3) That this general signification of preaching the Gospel is that which is here intended is clear from the symbolic act connected with it, – the taking up and digesting the little book as the subject-matter of that preaching: just as in the parallel instruction given by the Lord to the prophet Ezekiel; (Ezek. 2:3-8) as also in the case of Jeremiah. (Jer. 15:16) The “little book” in the present instance was the doctrine committed by Jesus to his disciples, – the New Testament, which they were to “preach to every creature;” and which injunction, both as to reading and expounding amongst heathen and Christian congregations, continued to be observed for three centuries as the constant part of Christian Sunday-worship, until, in progress of time, the professed Church could no longer “endure sound doctrine,” and, as they departed from the faith, discontinued the practice.

At the end of some four hundred years, Christianity, as we know, became nominally the religion of Christendom. Two centuries later the Goths, who had invaded as heathen or Arians, settled down into orthodox Christianity. Thus the world was in outward profession identified with the Church. And what then followed? By degrees the Scripture lessons were abridged; legends of saints were introduced in the place of the Bible; the Psalms, the chief Scripture lessons remaining, were chanted by the priests, instead of being read to the people; and, as language changed, owing to the inter-mixture of the Goths with the Romans, the services, being in Latin, were no longer understood. Preaching too became rare. For though to certain of the deacons and presbyters in the cities permission to that effect was given, yet was it considered that the obligation appertained only to the bishop; consequently the great mass of the rural population was left in ignorance. Homilies from the early Fathers, translated by the bishop or other more learned person, were for a while enjoined to be used instead of sermons; but even these were after a while neglected. Besides which, a restriction was imposed on the free preaching of the Gospel, no presbyter being allowed to preach unless expressly authorized by the bishop; and further, even bishops being required by the canons to avoid breaching any Opinion diverse from what was received as orthodox or from “the divine tradition of the Fathers.” In the ministration of sacraments and ordinances the essential duties of the priesthood were considered to terminate. The invention of transubstantiation but increased the evil, and confirmed the clergy more than ever in their neglect of the work of the evangelist. What need to preach the Gospel of salvation when at any time the priest could offer up Christ anew as a real and sufficient atonement for sin?

And so darker and darker these Middle Ages grew on. Here and there we read of some attempts to revive preaching – as in England by King Alfred, and by Archbishops Egbert, Elfric, and Peckham. About one hundred years after the latter came Wickliffe. Regarding this neglect as the “foulest treason” to Christ, he not only himself set the example of preaching, but he translated the Bible into English, and sent forth poor priests for missionary work. As Wickliffe in England, so Huss in Bohemia. But both Hussite and Wickliffite preachers were soon excommunicated as heretics, and nearly suppressed by the terrors of the sword. And so this most important part of the Christian

minister's duty – the addressing the hearts and consciences of the people from the Word of life, the setting forth God's grace and love through a dying, risen, and interceding Saviour, – was again neglected, and all but unknown, until the close of the fifteenth century, and until Luther began the Reformation. At this very period the word went forth, as from the Angel to St. John, "Thou must prophesy again," etc.

It is true that at Luther's ordination as deacon an old and primitive custom had been followed. The book of the Gospels being placed in his hand by the bishop, he was charged thus: "Take authority to read the Gospel in the Church of God;" and words were added respecting his not only "assisting the priests in ministrations at the altar," but also of "declaring the Gospel and other Scriptures of the New Testament, and of preaching the Word of God." Although afterwards, when ordained a priest, the paten and the chalice were given to him, and he was empowered to sacrifice (i.e., in private masses and the sacramental rite) for the living and the dead – a higher function too generally thought to supersede the previous charge – yet did he deeply feel his Scriptural obligation to preach. What to him that the common practice was for the deacon to read a few words in an unknown tongue? Had his priestly office annulled his deacon's vows? He felt not as others felt. Taught by the Spirit of God, he looked through the appointment by man to Him in whose name he was ordained; and from his earliest call, and with but partial enlightenment from above, he recognized the duty, and gave himself to do the work, of an Evangelist, as one appointed even by the Lord Jesus himself. The Vicar-general's order encouraged and confirmed him in his plan; and so the Church of Wittenberg, as before observed, heard the strange sound of a revived Gospel preaching.

Luther not only preached, but he circulated evangelic writings and taught by personal communications. As the Vicar-general's substitute he held a visitation of the Augustinian convents in electoral Saxony, and in this way was unconsciously preparing others of the monks and clergy to become preachers in the Church soon to be established. No sooner did he discover the Antichristian tendency of the restrictions relative to preaching, which we have noticed, than he set them aside. In his final letter to the Pope he declares, "There must be no fettering of Scripture by rules of interpretation. The Word of God must be left free." And both he and his brother Reformers acted on the feeling.

When Luther had proclaimed the Papal oracle to be the voice of Antichrist, and persisted at Worms before the Emperor in rejecting it, the severest condemnatory decrees were issued against him and his fellow-laborers. By these they were excommunicated from the Church and degraded from their ministry in it; and, on pain of confiscation of their goods, imprisonment, and even death, they were interdicted from preaching the Gospel. Luther was outlawed; and his friend, the Elector of Saxony, to save his life hid him in a lonesome castle in the forest of Wartburg.

In this remote solitude, called by himself his "Patmos," he had time to reflect, and to devise what could be done for the cause and Church of Christ. Would he now bow to the storm and abandon the work? Let us but follow out the Apocalyptic figure. "The voice said, Go, take the little book out of the

Angel's hand." Luther's chief occupation in his year of exile was the translation of the New Testament into German. He felt this was what was wanting in order to diffuse the light of truth among ministers and people, and for the overthrow of Papal superstition.

It was a work in which he delighted, and he expressed annoyance whenever controversial writing obliged a temporary interruption. He might be said to taste its sweetness, however bitter to him personally might be the immediate consequence of preaching it. It was now with him as with St. John, when having "ate the little book," he found it "in his mouth sweet as honey."

"Thou must prophesy again." Full well did Luther feel that the Gospel was still instrumentally the power of God unto salvation; that to its long neglect was owing the establishment of the great apostasy; that by the renewed preaching of it ("prophesy again") that apostate power was to be broken; and that on them who had been spiritually enlightened with divine truth devolved the obligation of accomplishing a Reformation. Could the Pope annul his ministerial orders or alter the obligation consequent upon them? Could Antichrist cancel what Christ had communicated? Tracing upwards, Luther felt it was from Christ his commission had come, and that its revocation by the Pope was impossible. Nor could his deference to "the powers that were" move him on this point, so that the Emperor's interdict was ineffectual. Confined in his Patmos, regardless of royal and papal orders against preaching, he wrote urging Melanchthon and his coadjutors to go forward, and to continue to exercise their powers in evangelic preaching. It was the repetition of the angel's command, "Thou must prophesy again."

No sooner was the translation of the New Testament finished, than he himself felt he could no longer remain silent. A crisis had arrived which seemed to call for his assistance. Persecution had begun against his fellowlaborers in Germany; besides which, a sect called Anabaptists had arisen, styling themselves Christians, but in truth bringing discredit on the name they professed. Melanchthon urged his return, with a view to heading the little body of Reformers in the fulfillment of their ministerial, it might be said their apostolic, commission. At the risk of his proscribed life, as if impelled by a 'voice' from above, he returned to Wittenberg. In excuse he wrote to his patron, the Elector, "The Divine will is plain, and leaves me no choice: the Gospel is oppressed and begins to labor." Again, "It is not from men I have received my commission, but from the Lord Jesus Christ. Henceforth I wish to reckon myself his servant and to take the title of Evangelist."

In pursuing the history, we find how successful was the aid which Luther gave on his return, and how God opened the door for the spread of the Gospel, whether by means of the translated Word or by his preaching. It was in A.D. 1522 that Luther arrived in Wittenberg; and within the two or three next years the message of salvation was heard by princes and people, not in Germany only, but in Sweden, Denmark, Pomerania, Livonia; in France, Belgium, Spain, and Italy also, though with less general acceptance, and, last mentioned but not least, in England. Preachers were raised up on every side, and translations of the Scriptures were multiplied. The prediction was in course of fulfillment. "Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and languages, and kings."

And here occurred an important point for decision, on which the continuance of this renewed evangelic preaching materially depended. Cut off from the ecclesiastical hierarchy, from whose hands were the ministers of the Reformation to receive ordination? Was the work so happily begun to cease for want of pastors? Surely not. Luther felt that where Scripture had not shut up the apostolic ministry of the early Church by an express prohibition of other non-episcopal ordinations, the very necessity of the circumstances justified a departure from the usual practice. He renounced the title of priest and doctor given him by Papal authorities, and styled himself simply preacher. This was in A.D. 1523. A year or two after, the function of ordination was formally taken into their own power by the Reformed Churches. In the German Churches it was vested in superintendent presbyters; in the Swiss Churches simply in the presbytery. On the other hand, in England, through God's providence several of the bishops having united themselves with the Reformed Church, the regular medium of ordination was continued; all, however, in Christian fellowship with their reformed sister Churches on the Continent. Of course the want of direct episcopal ordination in some cases, and the previous excommunication of the ordaining bishops in others, raised a cry amongst opposers as if the Reformed Church had no regular ordination for its clergy.³ Regarding, however, this interpretation of the passage before us to be the right one, we have in the fact of St. John's being made the representative of the faithful ministers of the Reformation a direct intimation of their being all in the line of apostolic succession; and in the angel's words, "Thou must prophesy again," of their being commissioned by HIM who commissioned the Apostles – the COVENANT ANGEL, the LORD JESUS.

One remarkable change in the ritual of ordination was now introduced by the Reformers. Instead of the words, "Receive thou authority to sacrifice for the living and the dead," as was the Romish form, a solemn charge was given to "preach the Gospel." Preaching had been so long neglected that they must begin again the preaching of Christ.

There was a change of symbol, too, as well as of words, the presentation of a chalice and paten being abolished, and instead thereof in many Churches being substituted the delivery of the New Testament, or perhaps of the whole Bible, now through the art of printing made "a little book." Our English ritual especially – in the authority presented to deacons and priests "to read" or "to preach the Word," and the injunction to bishops to "take heed to the doctrine" and to "think on the things contained in this book" – may be said to perpetuate the Apocalyptic commission. Surely the fact is remarkable. Nor would it be uninteresting for such as are ordained to remember this pre-enactment of their ordination in the visions of Patmos. They might not only thus derive strength and comfort in the consciousness of a direct divine commission, but, moreover, be wholesomely impressed with the duty of making the GOSPEL the grand subject both of their personal study and of their public preaching, and of maintaining a constant and faithful testimony against all superstition, sin, and error, – specially against those of the apostate Church of ROME.

[II] The latter part of the Covenant Angel's charge is contained in that which appears with our Bibles as the first verse of chap. xi, but which is

evidently only a continuation of the same scene as that with which the tenth chapter closes; the same Angel continuing to speak to St. John, and giving him a further direction. The temple, which we have already shown to represent the Christian Church, is again introduced with a new feature superadded, viz., its outer court, or court of the Gentiles. The altar-court is still used as the symbol of that part of the Church visible which faithfully adhered to the true worship indicated by the altar; while the outer court (which under the former dispensation was given to such heathen as professed Judaism, but too often apostatized) is now applied to represent those who, while they professed Christianity, had virtually adopted an idolatrous worship.

It would almost seem impossible for the Apostle not to view, in these outer-court worshippers, that line of apostasy described in earlier visions, which in one scene, under the name of Christ's Israel, had been satisfied with another life-giving, another sealing than that of the Angel of life; which in another is described as forsaking the great altar of sacrifice, and, again, as rejecting Christ's reconciliation and adopting other mediators; and yet once more – when the third part of men had been slain, as continuing in demon-worship and heathenish idolatry, – that line against whose head the cry of the Angel had gone forth in majestic wrath, and from whose seven-hilled metropolis had issued forth, in defiance of it, the seven Antichristian thunders.

This premised, the meaning of the clause will readily approve itself. St. John, representing at this epoch the Reformed Church, was desired to "Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles."

These four several points would seem to be signified, viz., first, that Luther and his brother laborers were directed, as from heaven, to a reconstitution of the Reformed Church, for the measuring implies the edification and constitution, as well as definition, of what is measured. Secondly, that they should define as the proper members of the Church such only as in public profession recognized the doctrine of justification through the alone efficacy of the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, and through Christ's alone mediatorship. Thirdly, that the Romish Church must thence be excluded or excommunicated as apostate and heathen. Fourthly, that for this purpose a certain ecclesiastical authority would be officially given to them, it being said, "There was given me a reed like unto a rod." The more frequent use of this word rod in the New Testament is as the ensign of official authority. On two occasions when the Jewish temple-worship had become corrupt and needed reform, viz., under the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah, it was the royal mandate that empowered the priesthood to carry out the purification. The original call was, of course, from God; but it was the regal authority which immediately enforced the act. Agreeably with these precedents, in a reed like unto a rod, which was given to St. John, was shadowed forth the support which Luther and his fellow-reformers would meet with from the royal and other ruling powers of those times.

And now for the historical fulfillment of this part of the vision. At the

time of his leaving the castle of Wartburg, in March 1522, to resume his ministerial labors, despite the interdicts of Pope and Emperor, the established religion in Saxony was still the Roman Catholic. Nor did Luther at that time wish for much more than the liberty of preaching the Gospel, expecting that this in itself would be sufficient for the overthrow of error, and that consequently the Papacy would fall to ruins. The measuring rod had not yet been officially given to the Reformers to authorize their reconstitution of the Church.

But it soon became evident that some plan of ecclesiastical discipline must be observed for the proper ordering of the Reformed services, the prevention of possible divisions, and the general support of religion. Luther's personal influence was, as yet, the only visible cement of union. He had appropriated to the maintenance of ministers, hospitals, and schools the revenues of certain old canonries of Wittenberg lately become vacant. Still authority was wanted. At length, after another year, the Elector Frederick, convinced that the Reformation was accordant with God's will, determined to give the required sanction; but before it was done he died. His brother and successor, the Elector John, assuming that supremacy in ecclesiastical matters was the right of every lawful sovereign, as maintained by the Reformers alike in Germany, Switzerland, and England, proceeded at once to exercise that right by forming new ecclesiastical constitutions. New forms of worship were introduced, drawn up by Luther and Melanchthon on Scriptural principles. Romish images and superstitions were removed; the ecclesiastical revenues of the electorate were appropriated to the support of the Reformed religion; and a fresh supply of ministers received their ordination, altogether independently of the Romish hierarchy. This was in A.D. 1525. Soon after a general visitation of the electorate by Luther and other of the Reforming fathers was made on the Prince's order, to see to the execution of the new system, and to complete the establishment of a separate evangelical Church.

The example was followed by the ruling powers in the Reforming states of Germany, in Denmark, Sweden, and soon in England. And here let us notice that the principle acted upon in them all was precisely that which was laid down by the Angel in vision for the measurement of the Apocalyptic temple, viz., to make salvation through Christ's meritorious death and mediatorship (that which the Jewish altar symbolized), the prominent characteristic of Reformed worship; and to exclude those who, forsaking that altar, had made to themselves another method of salvation, and given themselves to heathen superstitions and idolatries; in other words, the votaries of the false Church of Rome. Charged by the Romanists as schismatical, the principle was solemnly avowed and justified. At the first Diet of Augsburg, held A.D. 1525, a Defense, or Apology, written by Melanchthon, was presented by the Elector, in which the following points were insisted on: — First, that every minister of God's Word is bound by Christ's express precept to preach the leading doctrine of the Gospel, justification by faith in Christ crucified, and not by the merit of human performances; whereas men had, by the Romish doctrines, been drawn from the cross of Christ to trust in their own works and in superstitious vanities. Secondly, that it became the princes (to whom authority rightly belonged) to consider whether the new doctrines were or were not true, and if true, to protect and promote them. Thirdly, that the

Pope, cardinals, and clergy did not constitute the Church of Christ, albeit there were some apparently amongst them who opposed the prevailing errors, and really belonged to the true Church – the latter consisting of the faithful, and none else, who had the Word of God, and by it were sanctified and cleansed; while, on the other hand, what St. Paul had predicted of Antichrist's coming and sitting in the temple of God had its fulfillment in the Papacy. Which being so, and God having forbidden, under the heaviest penalty, every species of idolatry and false worship, of which class were the sacrifice of the mass, masses for the dead, invocations of saints, and such like, – things notoriously taught in the Church of Rome, – the Reformers were not guilty of schism in having convicted Antichrist of his errors, or in making alterations in their church worship and regulations, whereby Romish superstitions were cast out.⁴ Such was the manifesto of the Reformers to the first Diet of Augsburg. In the second Diet, A.D. 1530, the celebrated articles and confessions of faith were presented to the same effect. These and other confessions which were elsewhere “adopted differed, as might be expected, in some nonessential matters; but they agreed in all main points, viz., the preaching of the Gospel being charged on their ministers, – justification by faith in Christ being held forth as the only true method of salvation, – and a separation from the Romish Church being indispensable.

Bearing in mind that all this wonderful and blessed consummation was being effected just at the period of that memorable scene, the Papal triumph at Rome, described in a former lecture, let us observe how every point of triumph displayed by the USURPER was met and counteracted by HIM whose place he had so usurped.

The Bible, condemned to be shut up, was 'now translated, printed, and circulated. The Gospel, forbidden to be preached, was now, freed from all the glosses of the Fathers, proclaimed by hundreds. The Pope himself was openly declared to be Antichrist, which name he had forbidden to be named; and the day of judgment was held forth as a day fixed and coming, when his reign and power would terminate. As he too had excommunicated the Reformers, the true followers of Christ, so was he now, and his whole religious system and retainers, cast out of the real Church.

The wretched Leo lived not to see the separation accomplished, as we have described. But he lived to hear his bull against Luther met with stem defiance by this champion of truth. “As they curse and excommunicate me for the holy verity of God, so do I curse and excommunicate them: let Christ judge between us, whose excommunication, his or mine, shall stand approved before him.” He lived to see the failure of every means set in order to stop the progress of the Reformation. It remained for his successors to see this great revolution ecclesiastically and politically accomplished, a pledge of what yet awaits the Popedom, when “He that shall come will come,” and by “the brightness of his coming” at once totally and for ever destroy the man of sin and his whole kingdom.

Continued in [Revelation 11:2-6. Retrospective View Of The Two Witnesses – Part I](#)

All chapters of The Last Prophecy: An Abridgment of Elliott's *Horae Apocalypticae*

- [Revelation 1, 2, 3. St. John in Patmos](#)
 - [Revelation 4, 5. View of Scenery As It Appeared to St. John](#)
 - [Revelation 6:1, 2. The First Seal](#)
 - [Revelation 6:3-8. Second, Third, and Fourth Seals](#)
 - [Revelation 6:9-11. The Fifth Seal](#)
 - [Revelation 6:12-17. The Sixth Seal](#)
 - [Revelation 7:1-8. The Sealing Vision](#)
 - [Revelation 7:9-17. The Palm-Bearing Vision](#)
 - [Revelation 8:1-5. The Seventh Seal](#)
 - [Revelation 8:6-12. The First Four Trumpets](#)
 - [Revelation 8:13. Forewarnings Of Coming Woe](#)
 - [Revelation 9:1-11. The Fifth Trumpet](#)
 - [Revelation 9:12-19. The Sixth Trumpet](#)
 - [Revelation 9:20-21. The Unrepentant State of Western Christendom](#)
 - [Revelation 10:1-3. Intervention Of The Covenant Angel](#)
 - [Revelation 10:1-4. The Epoch Of The Reformation](#)
 - [Revelation 10:5-7. The Angel's Oath](#)
 - [Revelation 10:8-11 And 11:1-2. The Covenant Angel's Commission](#)
 - [Revelation 11:2-6. Retrospective View Of The Two Witnesses – Part I](#)
 - [Revelation 11:3-6. Retrospective View Of The Two Witnesses – Part II](#)
 - [Revelation 11:7-12. Retrospective View Of The Two Witnesses – Part III](#)
 - [Revelation 11:12-14. Ascent Of The Witnesses. Great Earthquake](#)
 - [The British Church Amongst The Witnesses](#)
 - [Revelation 12:1-17. The Great Red Dragon](#)
 - [Revelation 13 And 17. The Beast From The Sea, Etc. The Lamb-like Beast. The Image Of The Beast.](#)
 - [Revelation 14:1-20. The Song Of The 144,000](#)
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- [Revelation 15 And 16:1-12, The Seventh Trumpet, The Vials](#)
 - [Revelation 11:15, 19, And 16:6, 7. The Temple Opened. The Angel With The Everlasting Gospel](#)
 - [Revelation 16:13, 14. The Three Frogs](#)
 - [Revelation 17-22. Concluding Visions](#)
 - [Appendix – The Last Prophecy: An Abridgment of Elliott's *Horae Apocalypticae*](#)