

# The "Ten Days" of Rev 2:10

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For many commentators "ten days," as used in Rev 2:10, is merely a figure of speech. I don't think anyone would argue that "ten days" cannot be a figure of speech. The question is whether it has to be, and whether it is here. In some passages (Gen 24:55 ["ten days or so"]; 1 Sam 25:38 ["About ten days later"]; Acts 25:6 ["eight or ten days"]) it obviously is a figure of speech, because the writer makes that type of intent explicit and clear.

In other cases there is a question how we would know whether or not it is anything other than what it appears to be, i.e., ten days. For example, there are no references to 2 Chr 36:9 in the corpus, although the expression "ten days" is used there. One commentator or another cites every other passage which contains the expression, but no one cites this one. Why? Because it sounds very literal. What 2 Chr 36:9 says is that Jehoiachin reigned in Jerusalem "three months and ten days." Did Jehoiachin reign three months and a short but indeterminate period? No, he reigned three months and ten days. Commentators don't reference the verse, not because they are unaware of it, but because it doesn't illustrate the point they wish to make.

I think the same type of intent that we find in 2 Chr 36:9 comes through also in Neh 5:18 ["every ten days"]; Jer 42:7 ["Ten days later"]; and in all three passages from Daniel (1:12, 14, 15). Each of the above passages is quite capable of being taken at face value. Even in Num 11:19 ("You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, . . ."), the impression God is trying to convey comes from the sequence of numbers, not from the fact that one of them is ten.

In any event, having brought together forty-two commentaries on Rev 2:10, it is possible to notice how they fall within categories, within identifiable groups, and to offer some observations and responses. I'll do this by quoting only the material which actually bears on how to apply the phrase "ten days." For the list of commentaries, with brief quotations from each, see [http://www.historicism.org/Documents/Rev0210\\_Comm.pdf](http://www.historicism.org/Documents/Rev0210_Comm.pdf).

My problem with the commentators is basically that they don't attempt an application. They speak as though the prophecy were still future, but it isn't still future. We have some 2000 years of hindsight to aide us now, so it ought to be possible to offer some sort of opinion as to how the phrase "ten days" should be applied to history. But in general the commentaries attempt no actual application. There's a question why not.

The people who wrote these commentaries are not bad scholars, nor are they poorly read. On the contrary, some of them are outstanding scholars with all sorts of excellent qualifications. The fact that a majority of them find themselves defeated by this passage tells me less about the writers we're quoting than it does about the exegetical assumptions they bring to the task of understanding it. If I'm critical of anything here, it's the model, not the person that I'm criticising.

I come away with a very empty feeling as I go through the list of commentaries that pass by this important clause without attempting a serious application. During John's day or soon after it might have been acceptable to say, as Gaebelein says, "The 'ten

days' may be ten actual days. Or it may be a Semitism for an indeterminate but comparatively short period of time (cf. Neh 4:12; Dan 1:12)." By now, with 2000 years of hindsight, I don't think this questioning approach is an option any more. It was ten actual days, or it was a Semitism, or it was something else, but it's no longer possible to leave the question open like this. And commentator after commentator takes this very approach. It's as though the history of the period (whatever period, pick one) never happened, or historical records are unavailable, or if they are available they do not have any relevance. Why?

Not everyone avoids an application. The commentaries fall into two groups – those that do offer a historical application of the "ten days" of Rev 2:10 and those that do not. It's those who set aside the task of applying the passage that I have a problem with.

In the majority view there is an assumption that Rev 2:10 uses "ten" figuratively and "day" literally. Under these assumption thirty-nine very capable commentators can't supply a historical application of the passage. One of them (Gregg) explicitly says so and explains why: "History has not recorded any period of ten days that was endured by these Christians, though surviving records are very limited." And so this might not be the right model.

The application I have in mind is not poorly documented, or obscure, or historically insignificant. On the contrary, it's something that anyone who has studied the first few centuries of church history knows about all too well. This is the persecution that Diocletian started, although it was finished by others. After this ghastly affair had run its course there were people walking around with empty eye sockets and missing limbs and Harrington can say, but it was "a testing-time for all that." Of course this is not the period he was looking at. He was thinking of a first-century setting and only a week or so worth of hardship, which is not necessarily very much hardship.

Why don't more commentators make the connection with the ten years of persecution under Diocletian? To come out at this point one would have to use different starting assumptions. We have mentioned the results that follow from assuming "ten" is figurative and "days" is literal. What if we were to turn this around, applying "ten" literally and "day" figuratively. Three commentators in my corpus do this: Clarke, Doukhan, and Jorettag. Each of these men point out that the great persecution of Diocletian extended from A.D. 303-313, and therefore lasted ten years.

But doesn't the prophecy say "ten days" instead of "ten years"? There's an extended Seventh-day Adventist dialog about this question. The principle of equating a day with a year is often supported by reference to Num 14:34 and Ezek 4:5-6, but these are not the passages that use it. There are at least eighty passages that illustrate this fundamental principle: <http://www.historicism.org/Documents/YearDay.pdf>. Not just two. It was pervasive in Jewish thought during the time when the Old Testament was being written.

Once we go there, however, we're looking at a different landscape in Rev 2:10. If this one passage takes place outside the first century, the possibility must be considered that other passages also take place outside the first century. At issue is whether the book of Revelation is a book of prophecy, or a book of contemporary political reflection. If there are any similarities between Daniel and Revelation I submit that, yes, Revelation is indeed a book of prophecy. Daniel was certainly prophetic. At least Dan 9 was

propohetic when it foretold when Jesus of Nazareth would begin His ministry almost half a millennium after the prophet's lifetime.

Much more could be said about Revelation. But we leave this to other papers. Again, it is the starting assumptions and the model that we are talking about here. We need to follow the text where it leads. The text of this particular passage does not lead us to the first century, but to the fourth.