

BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson 21 - Chapters 10 and 11

As we left off in Revelation chapter 10, a mighty angel was standing with one foot on the dry land and another on the ocean. This was meant to symbolize his authority over the land and the seas; that is, over the entire Earth. In one hand he held a small scroll; his other hand he raised towards Heaven to swear an oath that there would be no more delay in carrying out the final acts of redemption for those who would believe, and wrath for those who would be destroyed in their rebellion against God. This mighty angel is very likely what the Old Testament calls the Angel of the Lord; or more literally, the Angel of Yehoveh. This is another and different manifestation of God Himself, as opposed to a created angel.

As of this point in Revelation all 7 of the Seal Judgments have occurred, as have the first 6 of the Trumpet Judgments. The Seal Judgments were given their name because the Lamb (Christ) took from His Father's hand a scroll that had been secured with 7 seals. Each seal represented a judgment, although the first 4 (and really, 5) of the seals were not judgments of God's supernatural wrath but rather were judgments of an exponential increase in mankind's inhumanity and evil against one another. The Trumpet Judgments received their name because each judgment was announced by one of 7 angels who, in turn, blew their trumpet to inaugurate one of the 7 judgments to which they had been assigned. So just as earlier in Revelation when 6 Seal Judgments happen, and then there is an interlude, and then finally the 7th seal is opened, it is the same with the Trumpet Judgments. Six of the Trumpet Judgments happen, there is an interlude, and then the 7th Trumpet Judgment happens. Chapter 10 represents that interlude in the rolling out of the Trumpet Judgments.

Now we need to address the matter of the small scroll in the hand of the mighty angel. So turn your Bibles to Revelation chapter 10 and we'll re-read the entire chapter since it is short.

RE-READ REVELATION CHAPTER 10 all

There is disagreement among Bible scholars concerning this little scroll that lies open in the mighty angel's hand. Is this the same scroll with the 7 seals that the Lamb had taken from the Father's hand, and the judgments that scroll commanded had already been carried out in earlier chapters? Or is this a different scroll altogether? That it is lying open could hint that it is the same scroll because, indeed, the scroll with 7 seals has been fully opened by the Lamb by this time. And yet, what the angel commands John to do with the scroll (eat it), and the results of eating it, hints that this is an entirely different scroll given for an entirely different purpose. Perhaps the majority view is that this scroll is the same one that Christ took from His Father's hand. The reason for this view is rather elementary: a majority of Bible scholars say that this mighty angel is to be identified as Christ! Thus while Christ is still the Lamb, He is also now the mighty angel and therefore He is holding the same fully opened scroll of 7 seals in His hand. Why do they think the mighty angel is Christ? First, because it is pretty clear that this angel is divine and not a regular angel. Second, because of the rigid nature of the Trinity Doctrine as it

is generally practiced in our time, a doctrine that says that God only manifests Himself as Father, Son or Holy Spirit, then the angel must be one of these 3 because there can be no other. By process of elimination it can't be the Father because in New Testament times He never comes down from Heaven in any kind of apparition or physical form and only sits on His throne in Heaven. It can't be the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit never manifests Himself as an apparition or anything physical. That leaves only one choice: Christ. And so all physical manifestations of God are said to be Christ. What we have, then, is a circular argument operating at its best (or worst!) A false reasoning is set up that demands we limit the possible answers to the identity of the mighty angel to something that fulfills a predetermined Church doctrine. This Church doctrine says that every apparition or physical appearance of the divine is Christ. Therefore the mighty angel can only be Christ; and since it's Christ then the little scroll that John eats must be the scroll that Christ opened. I don't subscribe to this line of reasoning and I also don't think the contents and purpose of this scroll matches with what we learned of the scroll with the 7 seals; so I see this little scroll (or book) as a different one. In fact, the Greek word used is **bibliaridion** and it means VERY small book as opposed to the word used to describe the scroll (or book) with 7 seals which is **biblion**. I see this very small scroll as a succinct, specific oracle of God given to John.

The big picture is that by John symbolically eating the scroll he is ingesting the oracle in order to prophesy about its contents. That is, this is merely a figurative way to depict the Lord delivering to John a divine oracle of truth that he is to tell others about (which is the main task of any Prophet). However what is given him is bittersweet. When he eats it his initial impression as it passes over his tongue is that it is delicious; it tastes sweet as honey. That is, the scroll's content is something that at first John welcomes and feels good about. But then it quickly turns bitter in his stomach as he more fully digests the contents because the oracle from God also contains some ghastly news.

As with the prophetic messages from other Prophets in the biblical era, a prophecy can be complex, simultaneously literal and symbolic, and also reveal something that is to take place now and yet again at a future time. Often the Lord will demand strange things of the Prophet in order to create a living illustration of the divine message. Hoshea comes to mind as he is commanded to marry a prostitute and then have 3 children with her, each to be given a name that symbolizes how God intends on dealing with Israel.

Scripture in general, but prophecy in particular, can rightly be studied and interpreted on multiple levels. Jews speak of these levels using terms like **p'shat** (meaning plain and literal) and **sod** (meaning mysterious, secret and hidden). Using Western terms a God worshiper can look at a particular prophecy from a far view in which we see the overall purpose of the message being delivered, but without much detail. One can also look at a particular prophesy from a near view in which we can find specific application and nuanced detail that is usually only apparent after that prophecy is fulfilled. And one can also look at a particular prophesy from a middle view in which we get not only a general understanding of the intent of the message, but also a bit deeper spiritual understanding using the God-principles behind why God is threatening to act as He is.

From the far view the oracle given to John seems to be about the nature of sin in general. The

eating of the little scroll is symbolic of the sweetness of sin as we are acting it out, and then the bitterness of the consequences of that sin, which inevitably comes later. In the Tanakh (the Old Testament) these sorts of symbolic illustrations that involves an action of some sort by Prophets is called **'ot**. It is a dramatic enactment of one kind or another (sometimes bizarre) designed to make an emphatic point. We've already discussed how God's oracle to Hoshea was dramatized by him being ordered by God to marry an unclean woman; a prostitute. **'ot** is used especially by the Prophet Ezekiel and Ezekiel's prophecies heavily influence the Book of Revelation. In Ezekiel chapter 4, he must lie on one side for an extended period of time. Then in chapter 5 he burns his hair. In Ezekiel 12 we find God ordering him to pack up his belongings and move as symbolic for Judah going into exile. But most closely connected with the **'ot** of John eating the little scroll from the hand of the mighty angel of Revelation 10 is that of Ezekiel 2:8 - 3:3.

^{CJB}Ezekiel 2:8-3:3 ⁸ But you, human being, hear what I am telling you: don't you be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth, and eat what I am about to give you."

⁹ When I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me, holding a scroll. ¹⁰ He spread it out in front of me, and it was covered with writing front and back. Written on it were laments, dirges and woes.

^{CJB} Ezekiel 3:1 He said to me, "Human being, eat what you see in front of you; eat this scroll. Then go and speak to the house of Isra'el." ² So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat, ³ as he said, "Human being, eat this scroll I am giving you; fill your insides with it." When I ate it, it tasted as sweet as honey.

This also closely relates to a passage found in the Book of Job.

^{CJB} Job 20:12-15 ¹² "Wickedness may taste sweet in his mouth, he may savor and roll it around on his tongue, ¹³ he may linger over it and not let it go but keep it there in his mouth- ¹⁴ yet in his stomach his food goes bad, it works inside him like snake venom; ¹⁵ the wealth he swallows he vomits back up; God makes him disgorge it.

What an important God-principle about sin this is to understand. Why do people sin? Is it because we don't like to? Is it because it tastes bitter in the doing, or because it tastes sweet? We sin because it gives us pleasure to sin. We like to sin. And when the world puts pleasure above all for personal fulfillment, then sin becomes normal and usual as it excites our senses. But when we realize our sin, and we repent and become a Believer, then although we may sometimes still sin, it no longer tastes sweet like it used to; it is almost immediately bitter. The sweetness of sin, though our old self still seeks it out, is lost to the Believer and we feel miserable when we knowingly disobey God. I've said before that perhaps the saddest people I've ever met are Believers who remain carnal and regularly seek sinful pleasures; but they get no satisfaction from it anymore and so they are utterly miserable.

I am hardly the first to recognize that, from the far view, the bittersweetness of sin is what this passage in Revelation is generally about. The Church Father Oecumenius in his commentary

on the Book of Revelation written in the 10th century says this:

When I took it, it says, I ate it and "it was sweet in my mouth" but after eating, it was bitter to my stomach. Then the blessed Evangelist (John) saw and heard.....how bitter and abominable are the transgressions of people that are brought to God.He is therefore commanded to eat it, and as though by taste and a sort of spiritual experience of the bitterness of sin that comes through his vision, he found that what had been sweet to the mouth was, when eaten, bitter to the stomach afterward. For such it is with every sin. It is sweet in the doing, but bitter in its consequences.

But now let's take a middle view of this same prophetic eating of the little scroll in Revelation 10. In order to do so we must start by remembering that John was a Torah observant Galilean Jew. His ONLY Bible was the Tanakh....the Hebrew Old Testament. One can only imagine how much he studied it. Even more, while Christians certainly can gain from reading the Scriptures without understanding much about Hebrew society, this entire set of visions given to John in Revelation were set in a Jewish context that necessarily meant that certain Old Testament God principles, laws, Torah commands, and history were foundational in its construction, and therefore in its meaning. Jewish children from the age of 5 or 6 were taught the Torah in John's day. So this is the backdrop we modern Believers must not only view it in, but also recognize that this is the context within which John would certainly have viewed it.

There is just too much symmetry and similarity between what John was asked to do (eat the scroll and it becoming bitter in his stomach) and a somewhat infamous and controversial Torah law that we find in Numbers 5. It is the law of testing a woman accused of adultery by means of the ordeal of bitter water. And I claim, quite insistently, that the famous story of Jesus and the woman accused of adultery in John chapter 8 is based on this same law of testing for adultery by means of the ordeal of bitter water. Let me say it again so that the connection is apparent: where in the New Testament is this story of Christ and the woman accused of adultery located? In the Gospel of John; the same John that is being told to eat the little scroll.

We must also remember that at the bottom of God's wrath is Israel's infidelity to him. Israel is as an adulterous wife to Yehoveh (as also demonstrated in the Book of Hoshea). Very briefly the water ordeal for the woman accused of adultery went like this: first the local court would question her and if she wouldn't confess she was sent to the East Gate of the Temple. There a priest (often the High Priest) would perform the ceremony found in Numbers 5. At the gate she was shamed and publicly humiliated. A special offering of barley, the food of animals and of the very poor, was given to her. The High Priest took dust from the Temple floor and mixed it with a cup of water taken from the laver where the priests and Levites would wash their feet and hands before performing their Temple duties. A curse upon her is written on a scroll, along with God's name, and then the ink is washed off into the cup; wormwood and some bitter herbs were added to the mix and the priest had the woman swear an oath. Then she drank the bitter water. If she was guilty then her belly would swell up. If innocent, nothing bad happened. Of course the effects of the ordeal weren't immediate; in fact it could take years for the results to become clear.

So while we may not find these exact steps in Revelation 10 with John eating the scroll and it

turning bitter in his stomach, all the principles are there and many Jews would have picked up on the allusion to it. Let's face it: what good is symbolism or a living illustration (an **'of**) if the people God intends it for don't understand it? We are all products of our immediate culture and it is our particular cultural background within which we understand and interpret things. Thus it was within the confines of his Jewish culture that John wrote all this down as part of his Apocalypse, and it became what we call the Book of Revelation. It was circulated among congregations of Believers, mostly still led by Jews at this time, who could help the gentiles understand.

To end chapter 10, the final words to John were: "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings". This is important because it is directly connected with the first words of chapter 11: "I was given a measuring rod like a stick and told 'Get up, and measure the Temple of God and the altar and count how many people are worshipping there!'" So the idea is that even though the bitter aftermath of eating the scroll had mostly to do with the infidelity of Israel towards God, the next thing John was to prophesy about had much to do with gentiles.

Let's read Revelation chapter 11.

READ REVELATION CHAPTER 11 all

This chapter gets into complex matters that have, in modern times, fascinated Evangelical Christians, elicited the writing of countless books on the timeline of the End Times, and of course been interpreted variously by different denominations and different Bible scholars almost entirely based on particular manmade doctrines they each have adopted. Some Believers have given up entirely on trying to figure out how to understand the words of this chapter; others believe that they have it down pat and there's no need to examine the Scriptures any further in this regard. I'm not sure I can offer anything particularly new; but what I can offer is a reading of these passages based on what we've learned so far, and what they actually say as opposed to the introduction of allegory that substitutes for fact.

Part of the problem here is separating the literal from the symbolic because we have a difficult mixture of both in this chapter. And yet in my years of studying prophecy and looking back historically into the Bible times to see how the Jewish people seemed to have missed so much of what their prophets predicted, I have learned one valuable lesson that I want to pass along to you. It is that in times past, and now, the danger for God's people has not been in misunderstanding biblical symbolism, but rather in not taking the prophecies literally enough. The vast majority of Jews in Christ's day missed who He was because they didn't take the Messianic prophecies literally enough. Their Messiah is to be human **and** divine? Impossible. He is going to come from Nazareth? Nothing good comes from Nazareth. He is going to give Israel freedom and yet he'll be hanged on a tree, cursed by God, and pierced? Preposterous. Israel's Savior will be a Lamb and a Lion at the same time? Absurd. But in hindsight the precision of these prophecies is astonishing; and they were anything but symbolic. With that in mind, let's begin.

The first 2 verses deal with the Temple in Jerusalem and God instructs John to measure it. The

first question we might ask is: which Temple? The Temple in Jerusalem no longer existed in John's day, having been destroyed a couple of decades earlier by the Romans. While of course there was the greatest hope for a new one to be rebuilt once the gentile occupiers were ejected from the Land and the Jews had reinstalled a Jewish king, the reality is that to this day (currently 2018) no Temple has been rebuilt on the Temple Mount site and none is in the works (although some private groups have done such things as build musical instruments, fashion priestly garments, and even set up training for future priests and Levite Temple workers). Since by the calculations of most academics and Rabbis that it was the 2nd Temple that was destroyed by Titus, then it would seem to be a 3rd Temple that John envisions. That would mean that this is NOT the Temple that Ezekiel envisions in Ezekiel chapters 40 - 48. That Temple is an idealized one that will stand during the Millennial Reign of Christ, after this 3rd Temple is either heavily modified or (more likely) once again destroyed as we approach the end of the reign of the Anti-Christ.

Now about this 3rd Temple; Pre-Tribulation Dispensationalists (most Evangelical Christian denominations) see this Temple as built and standing during the time period they label as The Tribulation (a time period that I hope I have proven to you doesn't exist by that name in the New Testament and was essentially invented by John Darby in the early 1800's). They see this as a literal, and not a symbolic, Temple. They also see Believing Jews (Christian Jews, so to speak) as those worshippers that God wants counted, and unbelieving Jews who are said to occupy the outside court.

Those who hold to the Preterist doctrine also see this as a literal and not symbolic Temple; but because they believe that the events of Revelation speak of a time before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D., then for them the Temple John is measuring is Herod's Temple (the 2nd Temple).

The Modified Futurist doctrinal viewpoint is that this is NOT a real Temple John is to measure but rather it is merely symbolic of those Jews within Israel who receive salvation at the end of history (thus measuring means to count the Jewish population).

First, you will notice that the Pre-Tribulation Dispensational view goes against the plain reading (the ***P'shat***) of the Scripture passages and assigns areas of the Temple Mount and the various courtyards according to their doctrines and to neither what the Scriptures say nor according to the traditional layout of the Temple in Christ's era. For instance, whereas Revelation 11:2 explains that the outer court is not to be measured because it is for gentiles, the Pre-Tribulation folks say that the outer court is for unbelieving Jews. And while they also say that the inner court that is being measured is for Christ Believing Jews, nowhere is such a thing implied in this passage. There is no reason to believe that regardless of who is at the helm of building the 3rd Temple whether it is the Anti-Christ, the UN, the Israeli government, or Orthodox Jews, that they would construct it any other way than the model and pattern of the 2nd Temple: Herod's Temple.

The reed or rod that John is to measure with is of undetermined length. There have been many guesses as to how long it might be, but all we can know for sure is that this reed or rod essentially serves as a surveyor's rule. The closest thing we have to go on is Ezekiel's

measuring rod in chapters 40-42, and that rod is around 9 feet long and I doubt that Ezekiel's and John's measuring rods should be compared. What John is asked to measure is NOT the Temple, but rather only the sanctuary portion of the Temple and the altar area; that is, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies and the Altar of Burnt Offering that is in front of the entry into the sanctuary. The Greek word often erroneously translated as Temple is *naos* and it only refers to the inner sanctum and nowhere else.

The Altar of Burnt Offering has historically been located in the Court of the Priests because they are the only ones authorized to serve at the altar, and I presume it is the same with John's Temple. In the time of the 2nd Temple (also known as Herod's Temple) male worshippers would assemble in what was called the Court of Israel, and the women worshippers met in the Court of Women. To be clear: in all 3 of these courts the ONLY people permitted were Israelites; gentiles were excluded. Therefore there is no reason to assume that it would be any different with the 3rd Temple. Then of course there are the actual words of verse 2 that specifically say that John is to leave out measuring the court outside the sanctuary because it is reserved for gentiles (not for unbelieving Jews).

The words used by the CJB and a few other English translations that say "the court outside the Temple" can be a bit confusing, because it makes it sound as though the Court of the Gentiles is right next to the Temple sanctuary. Rather the correct translation is "the outer court". And historically the "outer court" refers to the area of least sanctity, furthest away from the holy sanctuary, where gentile visitors can come and observe. And we're told in verse 2 that gentiles will trample over the holy city for 42 months. Trampling is the correct translation and it indicates something negative. It means to be contemptuous, or to defile, or even to destroy. Thus it means that the gentiles have some control over the Temple area and the city of Jerusalem that is less than ideal.

One of the interesting (meaning terribly messy) issues to deal with is the time periods that are presented to us. For instance, in verse 3 we hear of two witnesses for God who will prophecy for 1260 days. It is commonly said that 30 days is the standard Hebrew lunar month and therefore if we multiply 42 months times 30 days we end up with 1260 days. Thus the 42 months of verse 2 matches with the 1260 days of verse 3. While the math is correct, the true definition of a Hebrew lunar month is not 30 days. On the Hebrew calendar, including in John's day, the length of months alternated between 29 days and 30 days. That is, one month is 29 days, the next is 30, the next 29, the next 30 and so on. Why is it that way? Because a true lunar cycle is 29 1/2 days and it's impossible to define a month using half-days. But if one month is 29 days and the next is 30, when you average the 2 months together you get 29 1/2. So a true lunar year (meaning 12 lunar months) is 354 days and not 360. And 29 1/2 days times 42 months equals 1240 and not the 1260 that we find in verse 3. However, it is only Christian Bible commentators' speculation that says that the 42 months of verse 2 must be equal to, or even occur simultaneously with, the 1260 days of verse 3; there's nothing in the passages that says those two events are necessarily related.

It is commonly thought that the 42 months mentioned here is related, however, to Luke 4:25 when God, through Elijah, brought judgment upon the Land with a 3 year and 6 month drought. Others, including many Pre-Tribulation Dispensational adherents, see the 42 months of

Revelation 11 as directly related to Daniel 7:25. There it says:

^{CJB} Daniel 7:25 He will speak words against the Most High and try to exhaust the holy ones of the Most High. He will attempt to alter the seasons and the law; and [the holy ones] will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.

The assumption then is that "a time" equals one year, "times" equals two years, and "half a time" equals half of year; so, added together 3 1/2 years. Perhaps. But we have various methods of expressing time in the biblical era, and the era of Daniel is 6 centuries before the era of John and they didn't count time in exactly the same way in both of those eras. There is also another reality to deal with; it is that the striving for precision of time that we have in modern days didn't exist in biblical times. They were more concerned with lunar observations and the changing of seasons because that is what mattered to society because most settled societies depended on agriculture for their food supply. Exactly to the minute how long a day or month was, was not as important as determining a season. Yes, day and month and season did matter as to when to celebrate certain of the Biblical Feasts. But on the other hand, even going back to Daniel's day, the Hebrews were already adjusting their lunar calendars to the yearly sun cycles because otherwise you could eventually have the Fall Feast days falling in the summertime or the late winter, for example.

So here's what we should take from this: close is good enough for now. I just don't believe that it was ever intended in the Bible that we get completely hung up in End Times matters as to extreme precision as regards days and months. Even today there is no agreement among various Jewish groups as concerns calendars and how to calculate God's appointed times. Therefore I think that what we have given to us in Revelation are round numbers. A 30 day lunar month is close enough to 29.5 actual days. 42 lunar months equals 3 1/2 years provided we don't start adjusting the calendar for solar years. And therefore 42 months equals 3 1/2 years equals 1260 days. I have no doubt I'll receive emails from various folks who will want to debate about what they see as the correct Hebrew or scientific calendar calculations. But the truth is that exactly at what points during biblical history that the way of calculating months and years evolved among Jews is steeped in mystery. And, as the exiles from the Land happened, we know there was a certain level of adaptation depending on where certain pods of Jewish religious authority might relocate to.

If I'm wrong about this, so be it. But I doubt we'll know for sure until these events of Revelation actually happen. After all, if the exact timing of these sorts of things were so terribly critical, then (for example) one would reason that we'd have a biblical record of the exact day, month and year of Christ's birth. Or at least the year of his death. But we don't, and the debates persist and probably always will until Yeshua comes again and straightens us out.

Here's the final thing to consider before we end today's lesson. I believe that the most important element of what the time period of 42 months or 3 1/2 years represents is that it is only half of 7 years. That is, 7 is the ideal number; it is the divine number of wholeness, perfection and completion. Half of 7 indicates something that is not complete, not whole. Therefore 3 1/2 means that something has not achieved it's final goal, and rather the process has either been arrested or it is only partially done. And, by the way, that in no way means that

the 3 1/2 years necessarily continues until 7 years is achieved. Bear in mind, for instance, that in the mid 160's B.C. the time from when the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanies began when he set up a statue to himself in the Temple, to the time of the retaking of the Temple from him by the Jewish Maccabees and the rededicating of the Altar, was 3 1/2 years. Nothing of note regarding the Temple was completed with the passing of another 3 1/2 years so that 7 would finally be achieved. That is, the 3 1/2 years was not some halfway point. Rather it indicates that wholeness and perfection were never achieved.

We'll end here today and continue with chapter 11 next time.