

BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson 22 - Chapter 11

As we opened Revelation chapter 11 last time I mentioned that this was a pretty difficult and complex chapter, and indeed it is especially challenging when we take the time to actually analyze and question the point or the symbolic meaning or the literal interpretation of the numbers that are given to us. It is common in Western Christianity, especially among so-called Evangelical Christians, to make some broad assumptions about these numbers; however in reality these assumptions can generally be traced to the tacit acceptance of the Pre-Tribulation Dispensational doctrine and its offshoots that were only established in the early 1800's; such an approach was unknown to the Early Church Fathers. Thus we tend to **see** the numbers, but in another sense to **read right over them** without too much consideration as to their connection, order, or purpose. I suppose this may be because to examine them more closely can be a bit tedious, and perhaps give us more information than we want. Or it could shoot holes through a particular interpretation that you are already settled and confident in.

My conundrum is just how much information to present to you in our attempt to discern how to understand these numbers. Why are numbers important in the Bible and especially in Revelation? Because they go beyond generalities and principles and give us more concrete and tangible information in our quest for understanding what is in store for us and for the world in a not too distant future.

However my goal is not necessarily to provide firm answers to all the questions that naturally arise from reading a Bible book that is mostly about prophecy that has yet to be fulfilled. Rather my goal is to allow God's Word to open before us like a flower with its many petals that unfolds to reveal its complete beauty step by step, and only so far as the season we are in will allow it. So it seems we have little choice but to be patient in order to discover the intent of these numbers and where and to what they apply. I'll need all of your focus and attention today, but I think in the end it will be worth your while.

At the end of last week's lesson I told you that for the sake of trying not to become too confusing that we should assume that from the broad view the biblical use of the time periods of 42 months, 3 1/2 years, and 1260 days should be seen as more or less equal to one another. At the same time I showed you that the common statement among Bible commentators that a Jewish calendar month is 30 days, and therefore a Jewish calendar year is 12 months times 30 days, which equals 360 days, is not technically accurate. Hebrew months are based on lunar cycles, and this is ordained by God. An actual lunar cycle is 29 1/2 days so a Hebrew month ought to be 29 1/2 days. But since you can't have months with half-days in them, then as a practical solution the Jews alternated between a month with 29 days and then the next month set at 30 days. When you average 29 and 30, you get 29 1/2. Thus a Jewish calendar was not a calendar with 12 months of an equal 30 days each, but rather it alternated between a 29 day month and a 30 day month such that in the course of a 12 month lunar year you wound up with 6 months of 29 days and another 6 months of 30 days. However

that equals 354 days and NOT 360 days. And yet, that isn't the full story of the Jewish calendar either.

Long before John's era the Jews learned that out of practicality they had to adjust their 12 month lunar calendars based on the cycle of the sun. That is, just as in modern times when we define a year as the time it takes for the earth to make one complete orbit around the sun (365 days plus a fraction of a day), so the Jews were aware of this reality as well. And since a lunar year is 354 days and a solar year is 365 days then there is an approximately 11 days difference between the two (a lunar year is 11 days shorter than a solar year). So clearly a calendar based on cycles of the moon won't line up with a calendar based on the cycles of the sun. And since the seasons of the year (spring, summer, fall, winter) are dependent upon the solar cycle and not the lunar cycle, then the Hebrews had to make adjustments to their lunar calendars to keep them in tune with the sun cycle and thus with the seasons.

I won't get deeply into the variations of how this was done, but only so far as to say that at regular intervals they would add some extra days to their lunar calendar, and even add an extra month every few years, in order to keep their lunar calendars aligned with the seasons. Why was this so important for them? Because the agricultural aspect of their society was of course dependent upon seasons; not on moon cycles that have no bearing on seasons. And even more, several of the 7 Biblical Feasts commanded by God were, at their core, agricultural festivals that celebrated the harvesting of certain crops; and these crops grew and ripened at different times of the year.

Since most of the Biblical Feasts are assigned actual calendar dates in the Torah that govern exactly when they are to be celebrated, it wouldn't work well if, for instance, the summertime wheat crop harvest celebration came during a time when their lunar calendar date for the Biblical Feast that celebrated it (Bikkurim, the Feast of First Fruits) actually fell in the winter time. That is, the calendar (which is based on lunar cycles) says it is time for the Biblical Feast that revolves around special offerings of the wheat crop harvest (which is based on solar cycles), but due to the differences between solar and lunar years in actuality it is the winter season and the wheat harvest happened long ago. Thus there is both the practical and the religious need for synchronizing the lunar months to the yearly sun cycle to keep the agricultural seasons in tune with the Biblical Feast dates. All of these complex calendar issues and more plays a role when as 21st century Bible students we attempt to understand just how to comprehend these several numbers about the passing of time that we find in Revelation about the End of Days.

So I want to begin by showing you the underlying reason for why Revelation presents the numbers of 42 months, 3 1/2 days (and 3 1/2 years), and 1260 days as it does. And it is that they follow a long standing Hebrew literary convention that we find in many places throughout the Bible. The question is: why use all those different ways of expressing the passing of time if from the practical sense they are all to be taken to mean exactly the same length of time? That is, at least on the surface, 42 months, 3 1/2 years, and 1260 days are all exactly the same length of time; it is only 3 different ways of expressing the same thing.

The Hebrew literary convention I'm referring to is called chiasm. To be clear this is neither a

Hebrew invention, nor is it used only by Hebrews, nor is it found only in the Bible. But it is used regularly in the Bible because the writers were Hebrews and it was a commonly used form of expression among Hebrews. When we know that, then it helps us to understand why certain words were chosen. When we know those things we don't try to assign a passage using chiasm a meaning nor do we create an emphasis on a particular word, which was never intended.

A chiasm (also called a chiasmus) is a literary device in which a sequence of ideas is presented and then is repeated *in reverse order*. The result is a mirror effect as the ideas are reflected back in a passage. That is, a mirror reverses the image. Each idea is then connected to its "reflection" by a repeated word, often in a related form.

When trying to explain the structure of a chiasm it is usually through a series of letters, each letter representing a new idea. For example, the structure ABBA refers to two ideas (idea A and idea B) that are first written down (A and B) and then are repeated in reverse order (B and A). Often, a chiasm includes another idea (that we'll call idea X) in the middle of the repetition. The result is the ABXBA structure. In this type of chiasm the two ideas (A and B) are written down and then repeated in reverse order, but a third idea is also inserted before the repetition (X). By virtue of its position, the idea that is inserted is what is to be emphasized.

I realize that this may sound horribly complicated but it's not; we use chiasm in our everyday English language. The common saying "When the going gets tough, the tough get going" is an example of chiasm. The words *going* and *tough* are used in the first half of the saying, but then are repeated in reverse order in the second half of the saying. The structure is ABBA. Another example of a chiasm, also with the ABBA structure, is Benjamin Franklin's axiom "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail." Other chiasms can be much more complex, even spanning entire poems.

What can make chiasms more difficult to spot in modern Bibles is because of the standard use of chapter and verse markings. That is, especially as concerns the way a Bible book is divided into chapters (although it was not originally created that way), our minds operate in such a way as to subconsciously put a start sign at the beginning of a chapter and a stop sign at the end of that same chapter so we don't always recognize the original continuing flow of thought from the preceding or following chapters. Rather we see each chapter as kind of a self-contained unit; and therefore for a modern reader a Bible book is but a series of several self-contained units that we call chapters. However when we remove those arbitrary chapter markings and just read a Bible book as one continuous flow of thought, we can find all sorts of intended connections.

As concerns our matter of the numbers 42 months, 3 1/2 years, and 1260 days: when we find them in the order that they occur in Revelation, starting with their first appearance in Revelation chapter 11, we see that in fact the author, John, used the literary technique of chiasm to present them. Here's how it works: we have an A, B, C, C, B, A chiasm using those numbers.

A = 42 is found in 11:2

B = 1260 is found in 11:3

C = 3 1/2 is found in 11:9

Then, the mirror image of this order begins in Revelation 11:11.

C = 3 1/2 is found in 11:11

B = 1260 is found in 12:6

A = 42 is found in 13:5.

This is not magic and it is not some mysterious Bible code. It is normal and customary literary structure that Hebrews (Jews) used in their thinking and in their writing. It is intended to be noticed and a careful Jewish student reading John's Apocalypse would have caught on. What we must understand is that words and numbers were chosen to make the chiasm operate properly, just as when creating a poem words are chosen as much for their ability to rhyme as they are for their meaning. The use of chiasm has much to do with providing a memorization technique since most of how the contents of the Bible was passed around was orally; not by reading. So the underlying reason these numbers are used in the way and presented in the order that we find them in this section of Revelation has to do with making them fit into a literary structure called chiasm. But there's more.

If you look at the use of the numbers in this chiastic structure of Revelation 11 - 13, sometimes the numbers refer to months and sometimes to days. When we write down not just the number but also the corresponding name of the time period associated with it we get:

A = 42 **months**

B = 1260 **days**

C = 3 1/2 **days**

And then in the mirror image of this order that begins in Revelation 11:11:

C = 3 1/2 **days**

B = 1260 **days**

A = 42 **months**

So this is a well constructed chiasm in every respect and cannot be doubted as mere coincidence.

Now, it is my contention that we need to avoid getting overly technical or precise when defining the lengths of a day, month, and year as we find them recorded in the Bible. For one reason

calendars operated slightly differently depending on if one was Jew living in the Holy Land, or if one was a Jew living in the Diaspora. If we assume that out in the Diaspora in John's day (which is where he was) that Jews generally used 30 days to define a month (and there is evidence that they did because it was just too complex to try to operate under a Hebrew calendar in a gentile world without that minor compromise), and if we assume that therefore their unadjusted lunar calendars gave them a 360 day year, then the numbers 42 months, 3 1/2 years, and 1260 days all line up as meaning exactly the same length of time. But are we to take these as absolutely precise numbers? Perhaps. However I think these are **not** meant to be precise but rather are meant as "round" numbers.

Let me give you an example of why I think that way. The Bible tells us that the Jews were in exile in Babylon for 70 years; but does that mean 70 years to the day? And if the answer is yes, exactly what days are counted as the beginning day and the ending day of their exile? The 70 years could be exact according to a certain calendar but that doesn't mean it would precisely agree with another calendar. Couldn't we say that they were in exile for 70 years, but maybe by the calendar we use it was actually 69 calendar years and 11 calendar months? Or 70 calendar years and 1 calendar month? In our modern era we have dates that we choose to commemorate the start and end of wars. But those dates depend on exactly when one chooses to define the moment a war began and ended. For example: WWII was really two wars: one with Germany and it's allies, and one with Japan and it's allies, and they each started and ended on different dates. The war with Germany began as an intra-European war before the USA entered the fracas, and during that time Japan was already battling China and other countries before they attacked Pearl Harbor. Then how about the dates to commemorate the ending of the war? Was it when German generals began surrendering their battle units? Or was it when a formal ceremony occurred? Or was it something else?

So as for God's timing, it is hard to know exactly when God sees temporal events on earth beginning and ending. It's also hard to know exactly how He defines those time periods. It's one thing for God to announce a particular and specific calendar date (as He does with most of His Biblical Feasts), or announces a particular day of the week as the appointed day of rest, Shabbat (the 7th day). But it's quite another when he announces longer periods of time that don't have well defined beginnings and endings; that is, no dates are provided. Even more, is He giving us these time frames in terms of a purely lunar calendar, a purely solar calendar, a Hebrew calendar, or a Roman calendar, or is it something else? And if it is one of these calendars from exactly what era is it based on, and in what geographical location, because it makes a difference? Is He thinking in terms of the extent of time that will pass when a specific event is supposed to occur, and so the numbers generally define the beginning and completion of that event that is His point?

I think it is better that for our purposes we take these numbers as closely approximate in the same way a doctor says that you'll be over your cold in 10 days. Maybe it'll be 9, maybe 11; but who would quibble? But by saying 10 days we also instinctively know he doesn't mean it as absolutely precise, although neither does he mean it to indicate as little as 3 days nor as much as 15 or 20. So as we watch for these events foretold in Revelation to come about, let's not mark off days on our calendars and then be surprised if the 1260 days turns out to be 1251 or 1268 according to the way we mark time today. Nor should we assume that 3 1/2 years means

precisely 1277 1/2 days by our modern calendars (goodness, there could even be a leap year in there!) Nor should we necessarily seek to convert 1260 days as defined in John's era to the Julian dating system. This exhaustive precision of numbers and time that Westerners seek in our day is simply not what the biblical point is, in my opinion. But neither are the time periods expressed by numbers that we read about in Revelation wildly indeterminate nor are they symbolic as opposed to literal; however they may be both symbolic and literal.

OK. We've dealt with numbers, but now let's deal with the phrase "a time, times, and half a time". Found in Revelation 12:14, the CJB translates it as "a season, two seasons and half a season". I think while technically one could make a case for using the word "season" instead of "time", it merely confuses the matter since either way it alludes to the same words found in Daniel chapters 7 and 12. In the New Testament the Greek for "time" is **kairos** and it means due measure, a measure of time, a large or small portion of time, or season. So this term is quite general and is not at all specific. In Daniel 7 where this phrase is first used, the word is **iddan** and it is Aramaic that means time....non-specific time much like **kairos** in Greek. The question that I think we ought to ask, especially of Daniel chapters 7 and 12, and is why the phrase is expressed in such a mysterious way. Why not use numbers instead of just an ambiguous word description? If what God meant was 3 1/2 why not just say 3 1/2 years (or 42 months or 1260 days)? I don't know why but my speculation is that God was fine with giving Daniel a mysterious hint because He wasn't ready to get more specific. But in John's era He was ready to reveal more.

Sometimes it is possible to let the Bible define itself, and I think we can probably do that with the phrase "a time, times and half a time". If we look to Revelation 12:5 and 6 we read:

CJB Revelation 12:5-6 ⁵ She gave birth to a son, a male child, the one who will rule all the nations with a staff of iron. But her child was snatched up to God and his throne; ⁶ and she fled into the desert, where she has a place prepared by God so that she can be taken care of for 1,260 days.

Later in chapter 12 we read this in verses 13 and 14.

CJB Revelation 12:13-14 ¹³ When the dragon saw that he had been hurled down to the earth, he went in pursuit of the woman who had given birth to the male child. ¹⁴ But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly to her place in the desert, where she is taken care of for a season and two seasons and half a season, away from the serpent's presence.

Thus we have verses 5 and 6 directly connected to verses 13 and 14; the two passages are speaking of the same event. In verses 5 and 6 the time that the woman (Israel) will be cared for is 1260 days, and in verses 13 and 14 the same woman is cared for "for a season, two seasons, and half a season" (or "for a time, times, and half a time" depending on the Bible version you use). So verses 5 and 6 tell us that the time, times and half a time of verses 13 and 14 equals 1260 days.

That said, sometimes a number can be literal but also carry a larger symbolic meaning.

Remember that the number 3 1/2 is half of the divine and ideal number 7. While 7 indicates perfect wholeness, the number 3 1/2 indicates something that is imperfect and not whole. So I want to offer a possibility that when 3 1/2 is offered as specific number it is meant to symbolize imperfection and/or a process that has been interrupted and never completed. But when the phrase "a time, times and half a time" is used (perhaps as a substitute for the number 3 1/2), it intentionally avoids assigning the specific number 3 1/2 because while the number 3 1/2 has an understood symbolic sense, the phrase "a time, times, and half a time" has no symbolic sense (at least no symbolic sense that we're currently aware of). Thus in Revelation 12:14 when the woman (Israel) finally does go into the desert to be protected for a time, times, and half a time, even if that passing of time might amount to 3 1/2 years, this does not also symbolize something that is imperfect or not whole; that's why the mysterious phrase time, times, and half a time is used but the actual number 3 1/2 is avoided. Again; this is my opinion so take it for what it's worth.

Now that we've finished talking about these numbers and how we ought to think about them, let's resume with our study of Revelation chapter 11. It is best that we re-read this in smaller chunks as we talk about it.

RE-READ REVELATION 11:1 - 6

First I'll remind you from last week that the Temple John is measuring is not the same one that Ezekiel was observing being measured from Ezekiel chapters 40 - 48. The Temple John is measuring is what I would label as the Third Temple; it is the one that will be built in the near future before Christ returns, very likely at the behest of the Man of Sin who will be revealed as the Anti-Christ. The Temple in Ezekiel is what I call the Millennial Temple; it is built according to God's plan and it will essentially be Yeshua's palace. It will come after, and replace, the Third Temple.

Since the Third Temple will come as a result of a human political compromise between the government of Israel and a man inspired by Satan who later turns against them (he is the Anti-Christ), then we get this notation that gentiles will trample down the holy city for 42 months. To better understand this passage let's talk about an outer court in the Temple that in Herod's day was called the Court of the Gentiles. From the far view the Temple and its grounds were to be fashioned after the pattern of the Wilderness Tabernacle. The Wilderness Tabernacle was not to be a place for gentiles; it was only for God's chosen, the Israelites. Gentiles, even should they want to, would not have been allowed entrance into the Tabernacle courts. Therefore the Temple was also supposed to have been a place only for Israelites and not for gentiles. But when Herod extensively remodeled and expanded the Temple built by Nehemiah (and Zerubabel) after the Babylonian exile, Herod also expanded the outer Temple courtyard and gentiles were invited to come in to see the greatness and lavishness of the Temple Herod had built. It was so magnificent that the Temple was considered as one of the 8 Wonders of the World and gentiles came from all over the Roman Empire just to visit it the same way people come from all over the world to visit Disney World in Florida.

We read in the New Testament about how upset even the average Holy Land Jew was about the hundreds of thousands of gentiles that came to visit Jerusalem every year. Although the

gentiles meant no harm, and were merely tourists, the most zealous and militant Jews were outraged that these gentiles were allowed inside the Temple grounds, even though they were restricted to the Court of the Gentiles, so the Zealots regularly started riots.

This arrangement was never supposed to have occurred; it was nothing more than a compromise with the illegitimate Priesthood and a political accommodation to please Herod. It caused such constant trouble that a garrison of Roman soldiers was stationed nearby to interrupt the disturbances before they got too out of hand. What we find in the Temple of John's vision is that there is an outer courtyard, and gentiles will once again be allowed in. However the main concern is that the amount of gentiles will be so great and will no doubt have such an expanded role in both the running of the Temple and the governing of Jerusalem (called here "the holy city") that God and John view it as gentiles trampling upon (defiling) not just the Temple grounds but the entire city of Jerusalem. This will go on for 42 months, meaning that at the end of this time period something happens to change the arrangement. What, we are not told.

Apparently during this same time period two people suddenly appear who are here identified as "my two witnesses" and they will prophesy for 1260 days (the approximate equivalent of 42 months), dressed in the garments of mourning.....sackcloth.....that was also typical Old Testament garb for God's anointed Prophets. Is this the same 42 month time period during which the gentiles are defiling the holy city? Probably. Why **two** witnesses? And please notice once again we have a number and not just a word description so it is important that we pay attention to that number. We have precisely 2 witnesses; not one, and not three or more. Here is why:

CJB Deuteronomy 19:15 ¹⁵ "One witness alone will not be sufficient to convict a person of any offense or sin of any kind; the matter will be established only if there are two or three witnesses testifying against him.

God is going to judge the people and the city. God is one witness, and these 2 human witnesses make the total number 3 witnesses. The people and the city are about to be condemned; therefore a minimum of two witnesses against them (plus God as the 3rd) is required by Torah Law. Verse 4 says that these 2 witnesses are also the two olive trees and the two menorahs standing before the Lord. What does that mean? This is a strong allusion to Zechariah chapter 4.

CJB Zechariah 4:1 Then the angel that had been speaking with me returned and roused me, as if he were waking someone up from being asleep, ² and asked me, "What do you see?" I answered, "I've been looking at a menorah; it's all of gold, with a bowl at its top, seven lamps on it, and seven tubes leading to the lamps at its top. ³ Next to it are two olive trees, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on its left."

⁴ I then asked the angel speaking with me, "What are these, my Lord?" The angel speaking with me said, ⁵ "Don't you know what these are?" I said, "No, my Lord." ⁶ Then he answered me, "This is the word of ADONAI to Z'rubavel: 'Not by force, and not by power, but by my Spirit,' says ADONAI-Tzva'ot. ⁷ 'What are you, you big mountain?'"

Before Z'rubavel you will become a plain; and he will put the capstone in place, as everyone shouts, "It's beautiful! Beautiful!"

⁸ This message from ADONAI came to me:

⁹ 'The hands of Z'rubavel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will also finish it.' Then you will know that ADONAI-Tzva'ot sent me to you. ¹⁰ For even someone who doesn't think much of a day when such minor events take place will rejoice at seeing the plumbline in the hand of Z'rubavel. So these seven are the eyes of ADONAI that range about over all the earth." ¹¹ I replied by asking him, "What are those two olive trees on the right and left sides of the menorah?"

¹² Then I asked the question again: "What are those two olive branches discharging gold[-colored oil] through the two gold spouts?"

¹³ He replied, "Don't you know what they are?" I answered, "No, my Lord." ¹⁴ He said, "Those are the two who have been anointed with oil; they are standing with the Lord of all the land."

Verse 5 explains that these 2 witnesses are supernaturally protected by God as they observe and do the job of Prophets, which is to chastise and to warn. And while they no doubt will be warning and witnessing to Jews (they are in Jerusalem, after all), we have already been told that the city is overrun with gentiles so gentiles, too, will be the targets of their message. Clearly they are not popular among Jews or gentiles and, as it is with all biblical Prophets, that puts them in constant danger. But if and when they are accosted fire comes from their mouths to destroy those that attempt to harm them. Some Church doctrines say that the fire is not actual fire but rather it is the Gospel; I doubt that. I think it is literal fire because it kills. Because these two witnesses are actually Prophets, then this mention of fire cannot help but connect to Elijah as he dealt similarly with armed messengers sent by the King of Samaria to threaten him.

CJB² Kings 1:5-12 ⁵ The messengers returned to Achazyah, and he asked them, "Why have you come back?"

⁶ They answered him, "A man came to meet us. He told us to go and return to the king who sent us, and tell him, 'Here is what ADONAI says: "Is it because there's no God in Isra'el that you're sending to consult Ba'al-Z'vuv the god of 'Ekron? Therefore you will never leave the bed you are lying on; you will certainly die.'" ⁷ He asked them, "The man who came to meet you and told you these things, what kind of a man was he?" ⁸ "He was a hairy man," they answered him, "with a leather belt around his waist." He said, "It was Eliyahu from Tishbe."

⁹ Then the king sent a commander of fifty to Eliyahu, together with his fifty men. Eliyahu was sitting at the top of a hill. The commander climbed up to him and said, "Man of God, the king says to come down." ¹⁰ Eliyahu answered the commander of fifty, "If I am in fact a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and burn you up, along with your fifty

men." Fire came down from heaven, and it burned up him and his fifty men.

¹¹ The king sent him another commander of fifty, together with his fifty men. He said to him, "Man of God, the king says, 'Come down immediately!'" ¹² Eliyahu answered them, "If I am in fact a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and burn you up, along with your fifty men." Fire came down from heaven, and it burned up him and his fifty men.

Revelation 11:6 says that the two witnesses also have the authority to stop the rain from falling; yet another allusion to Elijah.

^{CJB} 1 Kings 17:1 Eliyahu from Tishbe, an inhabitant of Gil'ad, said to Ach'av, "As ADONAI the God of Isra'el lives, before whom I stand, there will be neither rain nor dew in the years ahead unless I say so."

And finally the two witnesses can turn the waters into blood and strike the earth with plagues; this of course refers to Moses doing battle for God's people with Pharaoh. So who might these two witness be? It would seem likely that they would be people whom God has used in the past; although nothing prevents Him from establishing two new witness/Prophets who behave in the same manner as Elijah and Moses.

We'll begin the next lesson by addressing that matter.