

THE REVELATION OF JOHN

LESSON SEVEN

Two significant visions are presented between the sixth and seventh seals in chapter 7, designed to comfort and strengthen the persecuted saints. Before the winds of judgment were released, the saints were sealed with God's seal. Then we see a vision of a countless multitude of saints from the ongoing tribulation, victorious and praising God. The seventh seal reveals the prayers of the persecuted saints before the throne, which follows with the beginning of the trumpet judgments against the wicked.

Between the sixth and seventh trumpet soundings, after the second woe, there is a transitional section before the third woe is revealed in Rev. 11:15. From 10:1 to 11:14, we see assurances that truth is not silenced or hindered or hidden during the trumpet judgments, but continues despite persecution. This section also serves as a preface to John's later visions of the ultimate defeat of the persecutors (Rome) by Christ (chapters 12-20), thereby firmly establishing that God's eternal kingdom is the only one that shall stand forever. Rev. 11:15 begins to reveal the seventh trumpet and last woe, where we see God's ultimate victory over the unrighteous world.

CHAPTER 10

The first scene is of "*another strong angel*" (similar to 5:2 and 18:21) coming down out of heaven. He is arrayed with a cloud and has a rainbow on his head. His face is as the sun and his feet are pillars of fire. These attributes suggest divine authority. The description here is so close to that of Jesus in chapter one that some have said this is, indeed, the Son of God pictured here. However, it clearly states an angel is being seen. With God's authority, he is on a special mission and his work highly important.

This angel carries a little book (scroll) which was already opened (ready to be revealed) and only tells of one aspect of God's purpose for John to see (hence, a little book). This strong angel plants his right foot on the sea and left foot on the land, indicating his message was meant for the entire unrepentant world, both

THE REVELATION OF JOHN

the proclamation of the gospel and the sending of judgment. He cries out with a loud voice, like that of a lion. The lion's roar was the voice with which God warned the wicked (Jer. 25:30) and with which He called His children (Hos. 11:10). The angel's voice provokes seven peals of thunder, each one speaking its voice as it rumbles. Thunder is often used in scripture to symbolize God's power, such as before the plagues of Egypt (Ex. 9:23) and when He appeared on Horeb/ Sinai (Ex. 19:16 & 20:18). John now begins to write what the thunders speak, but a voice from heaven prevents him from doing so. To "seal up" this vision does not mean it is cancelled, but rather that God has many weapons of judgment available and has chosen not to use these particular ones, nor reveal them to mankind. Despite our unending curiosity, it is not necessary for us to know all the details of God's power or purposes (See Deut. 29:29).

The strong angel now lifts his right hand to heaven and swears by the eternal God that there shall no longer be any delay in the discharge of God's plan. Verse seven raises the question of whether this charge refers to the end of time and beginning of eternity, or rather the end of delay for the fulfillment of the divine purpose regarding the church. That the latter is meant becomes clear when we see the wording in chapter 11:14: "*the second Woe is past: behold the third Woe cometh quickly,*" not over 2000 years later. The strong angel introduces the seventh angel's trumpet sounding, which brings the third Woe, for which there will be no delay. The mystery spoken of here was God's plan for redeeming mankind, fulfilled in Christ (Eph. 1:9-11 & 3:8-11). Man could not know this plan, conceived before the creation of the world, until God revealed it through the prophets, the scriptures, and Jesus Himself (Rom. 16:25-26). The angel's message looks to the completion of God's mystery of the gospel with the firm establishment of His kingdom and the destruction of the world powers such as Rome. In chapter 7 of Daniel, it was revealed that this eternal kingdom would be established in the days of the fourth great world kingdom (Roman Empire). Daniel not only prophesied about the nature of this kingdom and when it would come about, but that it would be opposed by the fourth great world empire (Dan. 7:15-28). The saints would not be defeated, but would possess this eternal kingdom forever (Dan. 7:18, 22, 27).

THE REVELATION OF JOHN

The next event involves a voice telling John to take the open little book out of the hand of the great angel. John asks for the book, and the strong angel commands him to take it and eat it. John is told that it will be sweet as honey in his mouth, yet bitter in his stomach. This is similar to Ezekiel's vision, where the prophet is told to eat a similar book and fully digest it (absorb its words - Ps. 119:103; Ezek. 2:8-3:3). Like Ezekiel, the bitterness will come when the message is preached and is rejected. Jeremiah had a similar experience when he found and ate God's words, suffering grief at the loneliness of his position (Jer. 15:16ff). The gospel of God is always sweet to experience, but the resulting persecution and eventual punishment of the wicked is sad and bitter. The strong angel informs John that he must "prophesy again." This most likely refers to the prophecies of chapters 11 through 22, although it could also be an indication of future work John must perform after the end of his exile. Perhaps the little book would be the message of the very revelation he was to deliver. Regardless, it seems most likely that the remaining visions of the revelation are contained in this little scroll.

CHAPTER 11

Through chapter 10, the focus has been on the judgments God's has pronounced on the unrighteous. In chapter 11, the focus changes to God's righteous, who have already been protected by His seal. The difficulty of understanding this chapter cannot be understated, and lack of careful study can easily lead to various wrong and fanciful interpretations. To properly understand the text, one must be consistent with the previous signs and vision we have seen. This chapter actually serves as a key to understanding the basic theme of the Revelation. The next three chapters provide further assurance to the righteous that the kingdoms of men will always fail to overthrow God's purposes and His people.

John is now given a reed like a rod (a measuring stick) and told to measure the temple of God, the altar, and the worshipers. The reed indicates the divine standard of truth by which all thought and actions are to be measured. This standard would identify the true saints of God. The altar was the place of prayer, and the worshipers were faithful Christians. Those who live in God's truth will be

THE REVELATION OF JOHN

known and protected by God in His sanctuary. The church is often compared to the temple or sanctuary of God in the New Testament, God's place of abode, built with living stones, and serving as a holy priesthood who offers spiritual sacrifices to God (I Cor. 3:16-17; II Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21; I Peter 2:5; I Peter 1:18-19). This instruction to measure the temple parallels Ezekiel's vision of a city on a high hill. Ezekiel watches as an angel measures the temple, court, and walls, indicating that everything about the temple would be according to God's specifications and completely separate from the common things of the world (Ezek. 42:20, 22:26, & 44:23). Zechariah pictured a Jerusalem measured but without walls built, as God would be their wall (Zech. 2:5).

Some conclude from this vision that Herod's temple must have still been standing at the time of the writing of Revelation, so John must have written this book before its destruction in AD 70. However, we cannot forget that this is a vision and stands for a concept, not a history lesson. The Greek word here used for temple is the previously mentioned *naos* (or sanctuary), which referred to the inner structure of the Holy Place and Holy of Holies. Only Jews were allowed to enter the *naos*. A different word (*heron*) is used when describing the entire temple complex, which in Herod's time included the huge Court of the Gentiles, where anyone could walk.

John is now told *not* to measure the court outside the temple. Whether one pictures the tabernacle or Solomon's temple or Herod's temple, there was always an outer court. Only priests were allowed inside the inner court (Holy Place and Holy of Holies), but anyone could be outside. The inner courts reflect the sanctuary where God's people will live in safety. The outer court(s) here stands for the abode of those who are not God's disciples. The Gentiles (non-Jews, those who are not 'spiritual Israel') are considered all those who have rejected God's authority. Those who are no longer faithful also are excluded from the inner courts. This single outer court in John's vision of the temple is left out from the measuring standards of God (*ekballo* – literally, cast out by force). Those who live here are excluded or cast out from God's protective care and considered not worthy.

John is informed that that this outer court has been given to the nations/ Gentiles/ heathen. Further, they will tread the "holy city" underfoot or trample it

THE REVELATION OF JOHN

(*pateo*) for 42 months. Several questions are raised here: which city is the holy city? What does the 42 months indicate? What is meant by trampling the city? As for the holy city, to the Jews it was Jerusalem. When used in the Revelation, the term 'holy city' is referred to as "*the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God*" (Rev. 21:2 & 10). When Jerusalem is named in Revelation, it is called "*the city of my God*" (3:12) or the holy city (21:2 & 10). The writer of Hebrews states: "*Ye have come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*" (He. 12:22). Clearly the holy city, New Jerusalem, and the temple are all used figuratively in the Revelation to refer not to a place, but the church.

The unrighteous (gentiles, heathen, nations) are to trample on the people of God. This same expression was used in Luke 21:24 to describe the literal destruction of the Jewish holy city in AD 70. Although the faithful are numbered and measured and protected by God spiritually, the church will still be despised and rejected by the world and persecuted. We are never promised eternal physical safety in scripture. This is in contrast to those who espouse the Premillennial theory of end times, who believe that these events are yet in our future and the saved will be removed from the earth in a "rapture" before a specific period of tribulation (mentioned in chapter 7). The true protection of the saints is their salvation in Christ and victory over sin and death. The world will do it worst, but they will never succeed in harming God's protected people.

The figure "**42 months**" (11:2 - holy city trodden underfoot; 13:1 & 5 - beast given power), or **3 ½ years** (also stated as 3 ½ days in 11:9 & 11 about the death of the two witnesses), is a recurring theme throughout the Revelation. It is the exact equivalent of the terms "**1260 days**" (11:3 – witnesses prophesy; 12:6 - woman fled into wilderness), or "**a time, times, and half a time**" (12:14 – woman is nourished; Daniel 7:25 & 12:7 – saints are persecuted). As seven is the complete or perfect spiritual number, half of seven indicates a broken or indefinite number or period of time. Unlike Jerusalem in Judea, the trampling of the church would be for a brief and indefinite period of time. Premillennialists believe that the 3 ½ year period is a crucial time for "the antichrist" to begin his sinful activities during a 7-year period of tribulation. In reality, scriptures do not speak of either of these

THE REVELATION OF JOHN

imagined ideas, nor any schedule or time frame for earthly events shortly before the end of time.

The next vision pictures the activities of two “witnesses” who will prophesy to the world for 1260 days (an incomplete time), wearing sackcloth. Sackcloth was a coarse fabric made of goat or camel hair. Frequently worn by prophets, sackcloth was often worn while mourning, doing penance, in times of humiliation, and during periods of deep and prolonged prayer to God. These witnesses have great power, and the number two signifies reliability of the message (two witnesses were the minimum necessary to testify to the truth of a matter in legal situations). There are many different speculations as to the identities of these witnesses. Suggestions include Moses and Elijah, Enoch and Elijah, Zerubbabal and Joshua, the Old and New Testaments, and the Holy Spirit and the Apostles. We must remember they are conveying an idea of a complete and thorough testimony, and identifying them is not really important. In a real sense, they represent the totality of evangelists continuing to preach, despite worldly opposition.

These witnesses are also referred to as the two olive trees and the two lampstands before the Lord. Here we see a reference to a vision in Zechariah 4, where God encourages and assures Zerubbabal, the governor, that the temple would be built “*not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit...*” (Zech. 4:6). God will achieve His purpose in the church with that same power. The lampstands support the light of the gospel in the churches (remember 1:20), and the olive trees provide oil for the lamps. God can easily support **all** His witnesses, “*for the Lord hath power to make him (His servants) stand*” (Rom. 14:4). The witnesses have great powers, enabling them to preach God’s word with power and strength. They can destroy by fire all those who would try to harm them. This may represent the power of the gospel, as it is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16-17), and the gospel purifies the hearts of men who obey it (I Peter 1:22), like fire separates gold from its impurities. God also made the words from Jeremiah’s mouth “fire” to consume the faithless (Jer. 5:14), and allowed Elijah to call down fire from heaven to consume the soldiers sent by Ahaziah (II Kings 1:10-14). The witnesses also have power over drought and rain, reminding us of the power given by God to Elijah (I Kings 17:1 & 18:1-45). They can turn the waters

THE REVELATION OF JOHN

into blood and even smite the earth with plagues, reminding us of Moses (Ex. 7:20ff). All these figures symbolize God's power to protect those who witness for Him. They will prevail until their testimony is completed. God assures us His word will never return void (Isa. 55:10-11).

God allows the witnesses to complete their assigned duty, and the Word is preached throughout the world (Col. 1:6 & 23). However, they are not immune to persecution. The beast from the abyss makes war with them and kills them, leaving them in the street (a sign of contempt and humiliation). This is the same beast as will be mentioned in chapters 13 and 17:3 & 7, revealed as a great world power and given authority and power from Satan (13:2). The mention of "the" beast suggests that the hearers of this letter likely already know who this is. This reference is to Rome, who then ruled the world and made war with the saints (13:7). The "great city" spoken of here refers to Rome, standing in stark contrast to the "holy city". Those who believe that Jerusalem and Judaism are the beast in question would say the great city is Jerusalem. However, Rome is figuratively called "Babylon" several times in the Revelation (14:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21) and also in I Peter 5:13. Given the historical situation, Rome is the 'great city' of the first century. In a larger sense, this great city is seen as a spiritual Sodom by its moral decay. It is also reminiscent of Egypt, which enslaved God's people. By saying "*where also their Lord was crucified*", we think of the great city also as a spiritual Jerusalem, where truth was rejected and the Savior of mankind crucified. Rome was indeed all of these terrible things. The disrespect, anger, and hatred of the all the world ("peoples and tribes and tongues and nations") for the witness of Christ is clear. Leaving them unburied in the street for all to see (for 3 ½ days, a short, incomplete time) exposes their utter contempt for God's word. To worsen the picture of their wickedness, the nations rejoice and celebrate the occasion when they no longer are forced to hear a message which pierces the heart. We remember that Jesus said the world would rejoice over His death (John 16:20).

The story is not over. After the 3 ½ days pass, God breathes life back into the witnesses. As they stand, a loud voice from heaven calls them to be taken back to God in a cloud, as the world watches. Their humiliation turns to exultation for God's people. We can easily see the analogy to the martyrdom of evangelizing

THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Christians as they are given a crown of victory and welcomed home to heaven. As the death of Jesus appeared as victory to the Jewish leaders, so the nations believed that the gospel could also be extinguished. The celebrations turn to fear and panic, as the world realizes that Christians will ultimately be victorious and God cannot be overcome. God shows His anger and indignation as a great earthquake follows, destroying a tenth of the great city and 7,000 people (literally, “the names of men, 7,000”). One tenth suggests a partial judgment against man (10 is the number of mankind), and 7,000 is a complete number signifying the full number that God wishes to kill as an example to the world. This result in further terror and an acknowledgment of God’s power and glory. However, verse 13 never says the wicked who witness and experience this punishment repent and worship God.

The vision of the two witnesses suggests three separate time periods after the inception of the church: 1). The age of the apostles, when the gospel spread nearly unchecked; 2). The age of persecution, in which the church sustained many trials and hardships; and 3). The age of the persecuted saints resurrection and glorification in heaven. We recall that in the last few chapters, the visions have been directed at the unrighteous in general, but the last two chapters have been more specifically directed at the wicked and persecutors during the time period affecting the seven churches, the Roman Empire. The two witnesses reflect the ongoing testimony of the gospel, which cannot be stopped. Not only will the church be spiritually protected during this time of persecution, but the preaching of the gospel and God’s truth shall also continue in completeness, accuracy, and reliability. Looking forward, we begin to see the weakening of the Roman influence and the gradual loosening of the grip of paganism in the hearts and minds of men. Verse 14 finally informs us that the second Woe has been completed and the third is quickly coming.

Verse 15 returns to the trumpet visions, and the final or seventh angel sounds. We will now see the unfolding of the third and final Woe, as previously heralded by the eagle. This third Woe does not signal the end of time and final judgment, as it is to come without delay (tachu). Rather, it signals the completion of the mystery of God which was announced and looked for by the prophets. Louds voices in heaven proclaim: *“The kingdom of the world had become the*

THE REVELATION OF JOHN

kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.” This is a perfect summation of the dealings of God with the world and the visions we have just seen. The 24 elders fall on their faces again and worship God. They direct another new song toward God, one of the victory of God and His church over the world. This song of praise not only recounts this victory, but also reveals that the time for judgment has arrived: the wicked to physical death and also the second death of eternal destruction, and the righteous to their eternal existence with God. The mystery is completely revealed, and the prophets and saints receive their reward.

As the chapter comes to a close, the door of heaven is opened and the complete heavenly temple is revealed (parallel to chapter 4:1), along with the ark of His covenant. The revealed ark symbolizes that God will remember the covenant with His people. In front of the entire world, God reveals His assurance that He will ever keep His covenant with the righteous. There is no longer a barrier between Himself and His people. Thunder and lightning and an earthquake and hail follow this revelation, harkening back to the scene of Jesus' crucifixion and the show of God's power. The veil of the holy of holies in Herod's temple was torn in two at that time, also revealing God's new relationship with the saints. We are now prepared for the things to come in the next section of the Revelation (chapters 12 – 22), as the prophecies of the little book given to John will unfold.