



THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

LESSON 7 – The Bitter Book and the Two Witnesses

LESSON OBJECTIVE

The goal of this lesson is to understand the interpretation of chapters 10 and 11:1-14 of the Revelation, with particular emphasis on the identification and ministry of the two witnesses.

NOTES ON REVELATION 10

10:1 “And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire:”

This particular angel stands out above the other angels we have seen so far in the Revelation, for he is mighty, clothed with a cloud, and with a rainbow upon his head. His face shines brightly like the sun, and his feet are pillars of fire. This glorious description has led many commentators to conclude that this angel is Jesus, but that is unlikely. Although he is described in glorious terms, there are significant differences between this angel and Jesus; for example, Jesus' feet in chapter 1 are described as being like fine brass and he was clothed with a garment, not a cloud. It seems that not all angels have equal strength, and this angel in particular is mighty. Probably, like the cherubim, he takes a place close to God, and therefore reflects His glory.

10:2 “And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and *his left foot on the earth,*”

As we shall see, this little book is not to be confused with the scroll that I have called “the title deed to creation” that Jesus received from the Father in chapter 5. The scroll in chapter 5 was, in the Greek, *biblion*, but the scroll here is *biblaridion*, meaning small scroll. Also, recall that only Jesus was qualified to hold the title deed to creation, but this scroll is held by the angel and will be handed to John, and therefore this cannot be the same scroll. The mighty angel places his right foot upon the sea and the left foot on the land, indicating that God has given this mighty angel authority over the entire planet (land and sea). Moreover, a point I will mention now (but defended later in the book) is that in the Revelation, the sea often stands for all Gentile powers, while the earth or the land represents Israel. If that is intended here, the point remains the same, namely that this angel has authority over the whole earth.

10:3 “And cried with a loud voice, as *when a lion roareth*: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices.”

The mighty angel speaks and his voice is loud like a lion's roar. It is unclear who the seven thunders are, although the fact that there are seven of them indicates they act in accordance with God's will.

10:4 “And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.”

Whatever the seven thunders said to John, he understood it, but is told not to write it. We are reminded here that we are on a need to know basis with God. He chooses to reveal certain things to us, but there are a great number of things we do not know because God has deliberately, for His own purposes, kept them from us.

10:5 “And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven,”

The mighty angel, that has authority over the earth, lifts his hand up toward the sky.

10:6 “And sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer:”

The mighty angel swears by the eternal, creator God, that “there should be time no longer.” We are reminded of the worship in chapter 4, in the throne room, where God was worshiped based on His being the eternal, creator God. The point of the phrase “there should be time no longer” is that God’s longsuffering is running out. And because He is the eternal, creator God, he has both the right and the ability to carry out the judgment.

10:7 “But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.”

John is now referring to the seventh angel holding the seventh trumpet. This verse helps explain the last one, namely that in the last verse the mighty angel expressed that the time of the end was near (“there should be time no longer”). That circumstance is connected up with the sounding of the last of the seven trumpets. The “mystery of God” that is to be finished with the blowing of the seventh trumpet is establishment of the eternal earthly kingdom of Jesus Christ, an event predicted by so many of the Old Testament prophets (see notes in lesson one).

10:8 “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.”

We are not told who is speaking from heaven, but it is the same person as in verse 4 and is likely God the Father or God the Son. For the first time in the book, rather than being a passive observer, John becomes an active participant. He is charged to take the little scroll from the mighty angel. Since John is not Jesus, the little scroll cannot be the same one introduced in chapter 5.

10:9 “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.”

John is commanded to eat the little scroll. This scene parallels the scene in Ezekiel 3:1-4 where, in Ezekiel’s calling to his prophetic ministry, he is commanded to eat a scroll and it tastes sweet as honey in his mouth. The point in Ezekiel is that he had to eat the scroll, that is, fully assimilate the prophetic Word of God that God would have him preach. Here in the Revelation, the point is a similar one in that John must fully assimilate that which God would have him preach. The message in the scroll is sweet to the mouth because it is the Word of God and it is a message of blessing and encouragement to the children of

God. But it is bitter to the stomach because, although it is the Word of God, it is a message of condemnation for those that are not children of God.

10:10 “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.”

John eats the scroll as he was commanded, and its taste is just as the mighty angel told him it would be. John is now ready to prophesy further.

10:11 “And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.”

The mighty angel tells John that he must prophesy before the diverse audience of the entire world. I think we are to understand that John is being told of the far reach the Revelation will have. Even in our day, the study of the Revelation has become increasingly popular, even among non-Christians. The proliferation of books and movies and a growing general interest in prophecy has caused the interest in studying the Revelation to grow. Also, I think the angel is telling John that the foreseen events are global. Verse 11 simply makes no sense if the Revelation is to be understood, as so many do today, as a book whose events occurred in the first century and, for the most part, only in a small geographic area of Palestine.

NOTES ON REVELATION 11:1-14

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.”

A rod is a six-cubit measure, or approximately 9 feet. A reed is a tall plant that can grow this height and thus provide a useful measuring tool. The point here is that John is being asked to measure out the earthly Temple for judgment, including those that worship there. Recall that Israel has had two Temples, the Solomonic Temple that was built around 970 B.C. and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's forces (the Babylonians) in 586 B.C. After the exile, the Temple was rebuilt under the rule of Zerubbabel. This second Temple was desecrated by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (i.e., Antiochus IV “God Manifest”), a Seleucid ruler over Israel that in the book of Daniel pre-figures the coming Anti-Christ. The Temple was repaired and massive restoration and remodeling began under the reign of Herod the Great (this is the Herod that ordered the male infants 2 years old and younger in Bethlehem to be slaughtered in an attempt to murder Jesus). Although Herod died in 4 B.C., the restoration continued for several years. This second Temple is sometimes called the Herodian Temple; it was destroyed by Roman forces in A.D. 70. The point of this historical digression is to point out that since there is presently no Temple, the implication from this verse is that the Temple will be rebuilt sometime just prior to, or in the early part of, the Tribulation period. God is indicating here a judgment against (unsaved) Israel. Keep in mind that 11:1-14 is a parenthesis between the sixth and seventh trumpets. God is backing up to show us other events that are happening during the blowing of the first six trumpets, just as in chapter 7 he showed us a parenthesis of what was happening during the breaking of the first six seals. Understanding the structure helps us understand the timing. God begins by explaining the judgment to come, namely the overrunning of the holy city at the mid-point of the Tribulation, then beginning in verse 3, it will be explained what is happening in Jerusalem from the very beginning of the Tribulation that leads up to the overrunning of the city by the Anti-Christ, which is the carrying out of God's judgment on Israel.

11:2 “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.”

The court outside the Temple, which was technically considered a part of the Temple, is the Court of the Gentiles. The Gentiles were allowed there, but were not allowed any closer to the Temple or inside the Temple. John does not have to measure the Court of the Gentiles because the Gentiles’ judgment is not in view. It is clear from everything that has occurred so far that the Gentiles reap judgment in this book, but here God wants to focus our attention on Israel. John writes that the holy city, that is, Jerusalem, shall be tread under foot by the Gentiles for forty two months. This is three and a half years, or half of the Tribulation period (recall, the Tribulation or Daniel’s Seventieth Week lasts seven years total). Recall from Daniel 9:27 that the Anti-Christ will make a peace treaty with Israel, but will break it in the middle of the Tribulation. That is what is in view here, namely that the Anti-Christ has broken the peace treaty and his forces have taken over the holy city, which they will hold through to the end of the Tribulation. Jesus refers to the book of Daniel and speaks of the very same thing in Matthew 24:15-22 (part of the Olivet Discourse); Jesus indicates that “great tribulation” will follow the abomination of desolation, and warns the Jews living in Israel at the time of Anti-Christ’s invasion to drop everything, run and escape to the wilderness. They will, in fact, escape to the wilderness (or at least many of them), and likely Anti-Christ will chase after them. Some people believe that many of them will hide in Petra in the ruins of the old Edomite city. There is good support for this idea because Isaiah tells us in Isaiah 63:1-6 that Jesus will return to Bozrah, which is in Edom. The picture is that the Jews flee Jerusalem for the wilderness just after the middle of the Tribulation. They are chased, but are protected in the wilderness (this point will be made later in Chapter 12), until their Redeemer shows up (i.e., Jesus) in Edom.

11:3 “And I will give *power* unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred *and* threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.”

God raises up two witnesses to prophesy for 1,260 days, or three and a half years. We will learn of their deaths later, and those deaths correspond to Anti-Christ overrunning the city, which helps us to understand that the events recorded here about the two witnesses occur during the first half of the Tribulation. This verse raises the questions of who the witnesses are and what their message is, both of which will be addressed below. For now, note that they are dressed in sackcloth, an act related to mourning and sorrow in Jewish culture (e.g., Genesis 37:34). The point is that their message is one of judgment. This is one of the reasons that we know that the people living in this time are fully aware that God is at work in judgment.

11:4 “These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.”

The verse alludes to Zechariah 4, where the priest and governor selected by God (Joshua and Zerubbabel) are seen as two olive trees. The point of that passage is that those two anointed ones are empowered for their ministries by God the Holy Spirit. That is the point here as well. These witnesses are empowered by the Holy Spirit for their ministries. Moreover, they are two candlesticks before God, lights to the world doing God’s will.

11:5 “And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed.”

Whatever their message, it is not popular because men want to kill them, but they cannot do so. The witnesses can shoot fire out of their mouth in self-defense, devouring those who would try to kill them. These two, for a time, are invincible and untouchable.

11:6 “These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.”

At this point, we can identify who the witnesses are based on Old Testament prophecies and what the witnesses do. I will defend that these are men in the spirit and power of Elijah and Moses. First of all, this will be a period of tremendous evangelism and revival, especially in Israel. Perhaps no two men could be more effective in evangelizing Israel than Elijah and Moses, or what we may call an Elijah-figure and a Moses-figure. We know from Isaiah 40:1-5 and Malachi 4:1-6 that Elijah was prophesied to precede the coming of Messiah. In Deuteronomy 18:15-18, we are told that there will be a prophet like Moses that God will raise up. John the Baptist was asked if he was Elijah or the prophet that would come in the likeness of Moses and he said no (John 1:21). Jesus was asked if John the Baptist was Elijah, and he answered, yes if you take him to be (Mark 9:11-13). Jesus offered Israel the Kingdom, but Israel rejected the offer and Jesus turned to the Gentiles. Had Israel accepted the offer, then John the Baptist would have completely fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies that an Elijah-figure would precede the coming Kingdom. Since Israel rejected, there will be further fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and another Elijah-figure that precedes Jesus' second coming, just as John the Baptist preceded Jesus' earthly ministry. Also note that in Mark 9:1-8, Jesus is transfigured before Peter, James and John. They see Jesus in all of his glory, and he talks with Moses and Elijah. Just as Moses and Elijah accompany Jesus' glory there, they will accompany (i.e., precede) his glory in the second coming. These are fitting witnesses as they represent the law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah), all of which was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Note further that these figures do the right things to vindicate who they are, namely the ability to bring down the fire of God or make it stop raining or turn water into blood or bring plagues; these are all things Moses and Elijah did in the Old Testament. That they do the same things here make their identification immediately obvious to the Jewish people. Note that the identification of the two witnesses is much disputed, and one of the common identifications is that they are Enoch and Elijah. These are the only two men in the Bible that were taken to heaven without dying, and since it is appointed for all men to die once, some argue it is necessary for Enoch and Elijah to be the witnesses and be killed. It is a maxim that all men die, but not an absolute; the rapture of the Church proves that. Aside from the idea that all men die, there is no other reason to believe that one of the witnesses is Enoch.

11:7 “And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.”

After they finish their testimony, that is, at the end of the three and a half years, right at the middle of the Tribulation, the beast from the bottomless pit makes war against them and prevails by killing them. This is the first mention in the book of the beast. The beast is the Anti-Christ. That he came from the bottomless pit or the abyss would indicate that he is demon possessed. He now breaks the peace treaty he had with Israel and makes war against Israel and defeats them, including the two witnesses (note that God allows them to be defeated, for before this time they were untouchable) (Daniel 7:8, 19-22). Since the beast is demon-possessed, Satan is in charge of him.

11:8 “And their dead bodies *shall lie* in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.”

First of all, let's now consider what their unpopular message is. I will suggest that they are, as the text indicates, witnesses. They speak the gospel of Jesus Christ, that he is the Messiah, that he died on the cross for the sins of the world, was buried, and rose again three days later. Moreover, they will likely teach that he ascended to the right hand of the Father to return and put his kingdom in place at the appointed time. Second, the city (Jerusalem) is spiritually like Sodom, which was exceedingly wicked and grievously sinful (Genesis 13:13, 18:20), and like Egypt, which was oppressive and made lives bitter with hard bondage. (Exodus 1:13-14) Sodom is usually remembered for its sexual sin, but note that their core problem was a lack of love; their lifestyle was contrary to the fundamental commandment of God that we love our neighbors. (Ezekiel 16:49) Isaiah said that Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziah and other kings of Judah, would be like Sodom if the LORD of hosts removed all Christians from the city. (Isaiah 1:9)

11:9 “And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves.”

Modern technology enables what is recorded here, something that was not possible until recently, namely that all the world would witness the death of God's two witnesses. They heartily approve of disgracing these men by not allowing a proper burial.

11:10 “And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.”

At the death of the witnesses, there is great joy on earth. Their message was so unpopular that the world rejoices not to hear it anymore. Moreover, surely they were not really from God if they were able to be killed! The joy spreads into some kind of international holiday of gift giving, until verse 11.

11:11 “And after three days and an half the spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them.”

Now let's consider what their unpopular message is. I will suggest that they are, as the text indicates, witnesses. They speak the gospel of Jesus Christ, that he is the Messiah, that he died on the cross for the sins of the world, was buried, and rose again three days later. Moreover, they will likely teach that he ascended to the right hand of the Father to return and put his kingdom in place at the appointed time. The veracity of their entire message is vindicated by God's raising them from the dead, just as the veracity of Jesus' claim to be the Son of God, the Christ, was vindicated by his being raised from the dead. But you have to question why God raises them from the dead. The reason, it seems, is that they have been preaching the gospel and what better divine object lesson for the veracity of the gospel than to see them killed and raised again.

11:12 “And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.”

They are seen publicly by the entire world to not only resurrect, but to ascend into heaven in a cloud just the way Jesus did in Acts 1. This, again, is a divine object lesson vindicating their message about Jesus' resurrection and ascension, pointing to the truth of the last part of their message, namely that Jesus is returning soon. That's why the last verse indi-

cates the public's fear, for they now know without any doubt that Jesus is the Son of God and he is returning soon in judgment.

11:13 "And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven."

Recall that after Jesus' resurrection there was an earthquake. (Matthew 28:2) This is designed to get their attention and make it known that the resurrection and ascension was real and was done by God.

11:14 "The second woe is past; *and*, behold, the third woe cometh quickly."

God has finished with the second "parenthesis" in the book. Now, trumpet seven, the final trumpet, awaits.

COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record*, Tyndale House Publishers (1983)

ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

J. Dwight Pentecost, *Your Adversary, the Devil*, Kregel Publications (1997)

Robert Lightner, *Angels, Satan And Demons*, W Publishing Group (1998)

RECOMMENDATION

It is highly recommended that each person taking this course read chapters 10 and 11 for this lesson and chapters 12 and 13 for next week in Henry M. Morris' commentary.