

Newsletter March 2018

In March of 2017, we began this extended study of Revelation with an introductory newsletter. Since then, we have generally studied one chapter each month. This month, as we mark the first year anniversary of this study, we are not quite half-way through that great document. In our January 2018 newsletter, we had continued in our study of the Revelation by examining the text contained in Revelation Chapter 8. With the opening of the seventh seal of the scroll in Heaven, our Lord sent forth seven severe judgments upon the earth and its inhabitants. This is symbolized in Scripture by the blowing of seven trumpets by seven angels, within a period commonly referred to in Scripture as the “Day of the Lord” (Jl. 1:15; Am. 5:18; Zec.14:1; 1Th.5:2). The seven trumpet-judgments are divided up by Scripture into two categories: the first is comprised of four initial judgments that are sent forth upon mankind by the glorified Christ through catastrophic upheavals of nature coming down from the heavens. In connection with the first four trumpet judgments, we put forth the possibility of the earth being approached by a relatively large celestial mass, perhaps a “rogue” star or comet, as a possible cause of these four events. Regardless of any underlying cause, it was Jesus Christ who had orchestrated them. The second category is comprised of three final judgments, which Christ brings about upon mankind through supernatural means. The severity of these three final judgments was voiced by a flying angel as three “woes,” signifying the mournful misery and sufferings they would bring about.

In our February 2018 Newsletter we moved on into Chapter 9, wherein we studied the first two of these woes announced by the sounding of trumpets 5 and 6. These two judgments had no underlying cause rooted in nature, but were supernatural judgments directly initiated by Christ, as he allowed Satan to release imprisoned demons from a bottomless pit to torment the minds of reprobate men and women who yet dwelt upon the earth. These demon-possessed men and women were then enlisted into an army of two-hundred-million, which was sent forth on a path of mass destruction across the entire earth.

Throughout all of his severe judgments, God has provided brief periods of time for men to repent. As with the interval between the sixth and seven seals, another interlude appears here between the sixth and seventh trumpets. As we concluded last month’s study, the last and most devastating woe of the seventh trumpet was pending. One third of the earth’s population had just been slaughtered by a demonic army, yet those who had survived obstinately refused to repent; they had continued on in their demonic worship and evil practices. This is an incredible indictment of the rebellious nature of fallen mankind that fully justifies the final judgment to come.

The text of this current interlude extends from Revelation 10:1 through 11:14. Just as between the sixth and seventh seal, several events take place here: First, John receives an overview of God’s plans and purposes, which are contained in a small scroll. When we later move into Chapter 11, John will be directed to measure the Temple in Jerusalem, which the Jews will have by that time rebuilt to blasphemously re-institute animal sacrifice. Then, we shall be introduced to two invincible witnesses that God will send to Israel. Their powerful message will go forth from Jerusalem to encompass the entire earth. In Revelation 11:15, the seventh and last trumpet will sound, heralding God’s final judgments upon a totally debased and obstinately unrepentant mankind.

We now begin our study of this interval beginning in Chapter 10, wherein John receives a small scroll:

“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:” (Re.10:1)

This angel that John saw emulates Christ in his appearance (cf. Re. 5:2; 8:3) in that he displays much of the glorified Christ’s visible attributes (Re.1:15,16; 4:3). This angel is adorned by a cloud, his face is as bright as the sun, there is a halo (rainbow) upon his head, and his feet are as pillars of burning brass. Nevertheless, this is not Christ as is quite evident by John’s description of him as “another mighty angel.” “Another” is translated from the Greek word *allos* differentiating this angel only from other angels of the same kind. Angels are created beings, of which there are multitudes, whereas Jesus Christ is their creator and a non-created eternal being having no equal outside the triune Godhead.

The cloud which clothes the angel speaks of God’s judgment, and the rainbow or halo (Greek *iris*) upon his head speaks of peace that will follow that judgment. After the destructive judgment of the great flood, God gave the rainbow to Noah as a symbol of his peace, as well as his assurance that the earth would never again be destroyed by water (cf. Ge.9:12-16). We still view this sign as a rainbow that often follows a violent thunderstorm. The rainbow speaks of the angel’s peaceful intent and purpose. After the fiery destruction that had

just taken place on earth, God sought to reassure John in this manner regarding the peace that was yet to come after the storm of God's judgment passes by.

“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” (Re.10:2).

Many have seen this “book” as being the seven-sealed scroll that Jesus had earlier received from the hand of his Father. However, that scroll is now in the firm and permanent possession of Jesus Christ – forever its rightful owner. Moreover, there still remains one unbroken seal on that scroll such that it is not yet been opened. Whereas the seven sealed “scroll” is translated from the Greek word *biblion*, this little book is here translated from *bibliaridion*, which designates a small scroll or booklet to differentiate it from the seven-sealed scroll. The small scroll held by this angel has not been sealed, and it is in fact being held open in the hand of this mighty angel as if he is eager to display its contents to John. The fact that this angel can place one foot on the land and the other on the sea demonstrates his immense size.

In Chapter 9, we saw Satan and his demons turned loose to gain dominion over the earth and they brought forth mass destruction upon mankind as they willed; evil had seemingly overpowered good. To reassure John of Christ's ultimate control and power over evil, this mighty angel plants his feet, which are as pillars of fire, on both the earth and the sea to proclaim Christ's resolve to stamp out Satan and his demons, and to exercise his rightful authority to rule over the entire earth and all that is within its oceans and upon its continents.

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

As we saw in Re.9:20,21, mankind will utterly refuse to repent even after they have suffered through six very severe trumpet judgments, even as the last of the three woes hangs over them. When the mighty angel shouts out his angry disapproval of mankind's refusal to submit to Jesus Christ's rule over them, seven thundering voices out of Heaven seem to echo God's righteous agreement with the angel's angry roar with words of their own. Thunder often signals God's righteous judgment, and here it probably portends God's seven final judgments, which will be poured out upon the earth when the seventh trumpet sounds.

“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” (Re.10:4).

It is quite apparent that John had heard and understood the voices of the seven thunders, inasmuch as he was prepared to write down their very words. Although the Book of Revelation is not a sealed book, we find here that John was ordered by a voice out of Heaven not to write down the sayings of the seven thunders that he had heard. Apparently they were intended for John's ears alone. Obediently, John did not write them down, and consequently they do not appear anywhere in our text. For that reason, it is impossible and inappropriate to comment on them any further.

There are many things that God speaks in the privacy of his own council that He does not want to reveal to mankind. The Apostle Paul spoke of such an instance he had once experienced: “How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2Co.12:4). Paul had apparently overheard these words that were not directed to him, but at other times such as here with John, God directly reveals things to one individual, but does not want it generally known to everyone. There are also texts in Daniel's prophecy where he is told to seal or conceal certain things until a future age when He will make them evident (cf. Da.8:26;12:9). Nevertheless, God has revealed everything to us that we need to know so that we may understand his will for us: “The secret *things belong* unto the LORD our God: but those *things which are* revealed *belong* unto us and to our children for ever, that *we* may do all the words of this law” (De.29:29).

“And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and swore 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” (Re.10:5,6):

Again, this mighty angel is described as standing on the earth and the sea. The angel swears by the Creator of “heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth.” In so doing, he validates that what he is about to say is in full accord with God's divine will. The phrase “there should be time no longer,” is best interpreted to mean that there shall be no more time allocated to sinful mankind for his repentance and redemption, and therefore no need

of further delay before pouring out God's final wrath upon the sin-filled earth. That final judgment will rapidly come to pass when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, thus opening the way for God's wrath to be poured out full strength upon the earth's reprobate inhabitants.

“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” (Re.10:7).

We note that this seventh angel will blow his trumpet over a period of time, perhaps days, from the phrase “begin to sound.” That is because this last trumpet signals the wrath of God, which will be poured out upon the earth's inhabitants from seven shallow bowls. In Scripture, a mystery is something that God has preordained, yet has kept hidden from mankind in a previous age to be revealed in the future when He wills it. There are many such things that God had declared to the prophets of old that were mysteries to them, but were later revealed to men in the New Testament. Among those are the mystery of the Gospel of salvation by grace alone, the redemption of Gentiles, and the enigma of a new-covenant Church. When the seventh angel sounds, all of these mysteries will be fully and finally revealed and realized in the person of Jesus Christ.

“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” (Re.10:8).

Here John is again commanded by the voice out of Heaven, which as been guiding him all along. This time, the voice directs him to approach the mighty angel, and to take the small scroll from his hand. The fact that the scroll is held open indicates that God desires to share the contents of it with John.

“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” (Re.10:9).

When John approaches this mighty angel, he must ask him to give him the scroll. While presenting the scroll to John, the angel tells him that he should take it and to “eat it up.” This seems a strange request inasmuch as one does not ordinarily eat a book. The Greek word translated “eat it up” is *katesthio*, which can be translated “consume” or “devour” – either literally or figuratively. It is obvious that the angel is telling John not to just quickly read, but to consume and memorize the contents of the scroll. In keeping with this symbolization, the angel then tells John that its contents will make his stomach bitter, yet it will be very sweet for him to taste.

“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” (Re.10:10).

As he was commanded, John took the scroll from the angels hand and “ate it up.” It was not at all bitter; indeed, it was sweet to ingest the contents of this little scroll, because through it God was sharing matters with him that were wondrous indeed. However, once the contents were fully known and contemplated, that digested knowledge caused John to anguish over its ramifications – it had become emotionally bitter to his stomach.

We can understand what John was saying here to some extent. From the beginning of our study of Revelation, it was sweet to read and joyous to examine its contents, that we may better get to know Jesus Christ in his eternal glorified state, as well as his plans for the glorious future of a redeemed mankind. Nevertheless, when we discovered in some detail what terrible things must come to pass upon the earth as He judges the reprobate, we greatly sorrow and anguish over their terrible suffering and their final destiny.

John does not reveal the contents of this scroll to us here; however, we may gain some sense of its contents when we study an unusual vision that John reveals to us in Revelation Chapter 12.

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

While John surely expected this prophetic document to be delivered to the Church in some manner, he had no assurance that he would live to deliver it in person. In this verse, the mighty angel assures John that he must live to prophesy again before many peoples, language groups, nations, and kings. Of course, the prophecy contained in this very document has been preserved through the ages to present John's testimony worldwide to people of every nation, language, and station of life. However, the literal sense of this verse is that John would one day be freed from his captivity to personally deliver the document and to prophesy concerning its contents. It is known that Nerva, the successor of Domitian, freed John and returned him to Ephesus near the end of the first century – thus fulfilling this angel's final pronouncement. © Arthur J. Smith, March 2018