

## UNDERSTANDING THAT WEIRD BOOK OF REVELATION - Part eight

Sunday, November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017 - 6 p.m. - Teaching #2010

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### DIGESTING AND PROCLAIMING THE NEWS OF GOD'S COMING WRATH

**Revelation 10:1-11** - "Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. [2] He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, [3] and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded. [4] And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down." [5] And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven [6] and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay, [7] but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.[8] Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." [9] So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, "Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." [10] And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter. [11] And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."

Just to recap, we are right at the point between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpets. Remember, first there were the seven seals. The opening of these seals unfolds the course of this whole age, up to and including the end of the age and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The span of the seven seals corresponds with the words of Jesus regarding the events leading up to His coming in His words in Matthew chapter 24.

Between the sixth and seventh seals John was given two visions. These two visions interrupt the flow of the revelation of the seven seals. These two visions of the numbering of the people of God *before* the Tribulation (the **144,000**), and the celebration of the same crowd, pictured *after* the Tribulation (**"a great throng from every tongue, tribe, and nation"**), are given to comfort the church in the face of the persecution she is about to face at the hands of antichrist and the Devil.

Then the seventh seal *contains* the blowing of the seven trumpets. This, please remember, we said was of great importance to understanding the prophetic flow of the whole book of Revelation. Each of the three **"sevens"** - the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls - brings us right up to the very end of this age and the Second Coming of Jesus. In other words, ***the end time events pile up on top of each other, both in speed and in intensity.***

We are now reaching the end of the sounding of the seven trumpets in our study of Revelation. Six have sounded. And one would expect that the next event we would read about would be the sounding of the seventh trumpet. But such is not the case. What we find next, in the tenth chapter of Revelation, is another **visionary interlude**. And this interlude comes, interestingly, at the very same point - between the sixth and seventh trumpets, just as the previous interlude came between the sixth and seventh seals.

The first vision (there are several) that John sees is of a **mighty angel with a little book: Revelation 10:1-7** - "Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. [2] He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, [3] and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded. [4] And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down. [5] And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven [6] and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay, [7] but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

There are some marvelous truths in these verses that we need to take the time to consider carefully:

- 1) **FIRST, CONSIDER THE REASON FOR THESE VISIONS BEING GIVEN TO JOHN RIGHT AT THIS TIME - BETWEEN THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH TRUMPETS**

There is a specific reason for these interlude visions being given to John, and it's one that lies very close to my heart. There

is a very important lesson for the church in these last days that can be easily missed if all one looks for is sensational, movie-like prophetic events.

John was in exile for a specific reason. Do you remember it? **Revelation 1:9** - **"I John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."**

It's a **risky thing to give testimony to Jesus Christ**. It's a blessing to **receive** from Jesus Christ. But it's always risky to **proclaim** Jesus Christ. This was especially true in John's time. Jesus said most of the Old Testament prophets who proclaimed God's message were killed. They beheaded John the baptist. They crucified Jesus Christ. All but one, or perhaps two, of the twelve apostles were executed. And the Apostle John was in exile on the island of Patmos. **It's a risky thing to bear faithful testimony to Jesus Christ.**

If you take the time to look back carefully over the portions of the Revelation we have already studied you will find repeated reference to this theme of staying faithful with the message we've received from our Lord: **Revelation 2:10** - **"Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."**

Our Lord passes on this message to the little church at Smyrna. They are going to pay a high price for being faithful witnesses to Jesus Christ.

Antipas is mentioned as a faithful witness in Jesus' words to the church at Pergamum - **Revelation 2:13** - **"I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells."**

Jesus reminds the church at Laodicea that He Himself is called the **"faithful witness."** In fact, He's called by this title twice in the opening chapters of Revelation: **Revelation 3:14** - **"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.'"**

See also **Revelation 1:5** - **"....and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood...."** Jesus was **the** faithful witness to the truth. And they killed Jesus.

One more thing on this point: We know from what is revealed a little further in the Revelation that this kind of hatred of the truth, and persecution of those who give faithful witness to it, is not going to get better or ease up. It's going to intensify and get much worse: **Revelation 17:6** - **"And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her, I marveled greatly."**

John sees this vision of the great harlot - this representation of the world's system ordered against Christ and His Church. And like every other living thing, she needs food and nourishment. Only in her case, she feeds - she is actually full and drunk with the blood of the saints, the **"faithful witnesses of Jesus."**

All of that background to say this: These will not be easy days to stay faithful to Jesus Christ. As I said earlier in these studies, **Christians will be forced to declare themselves**. There will be no Christians **incognito**. Everyone will be **"marked"** (in some way not fully explained) either by God or by antichrist.

**John is given revelation of all this**. He **sees** all these things coming. And, in a way he can't even imagine yet, he will be given even more to share. He has yet to even be shown the unbelievable events of the seven bowls of God's wrath.

So **before** the contents of more detailed and explicit revelation are given to John, God in His mercy **recommissions** John - **"John, you are going to need to be fully committed to proclaiming my message. It's not always easy. Remember, these aren't just your ideas or imaginations** (Did John, like you and I, ever doubt that all of these ideas were actually coming from God?). **Don't turn from my truth. There's still more to come. Don't waver. Don't compromise or alter the message. Be a faithful witness - just like I was a faithful witness!"**

By the way, that word **"witness"** comes from the Greek word **"martus,"** from which we get our English word, **"martyr."**

Right away we're reminded that being a faithful witness is a dangerous business. It always **costs** to be a faithful witness.

## 2) THE VISION OF THE ANGEL FITS WITH THE NATURE OF JOHN'S ASSIGNMENT

Of all the appearances of angels in the Bible, this is absolutely my favorite. I love the sheer grandeur and power in the description: **Revelation 10:1-3** - "Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. [2] He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, [3] and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded."

This is no chubby-cheeked baby cherub. This is no tinsel angel from "It's A Wonderful Life," singing around the Christmas tree with Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed. This is no **tame** angel. This is a real, vast, full-blooded, smoke from the nostrils, lion-roaring, ocean-striding angel. I love it!

With all that John was facing, and with all the message he was called to proclaim, this is the kind of angel he needed to see. And it's the kind I need to see. We desperately need a much mightier picture of the power of heaven.

There is an incident from our early marriage that my wife still delights to hold up to shame me in front of close friends. At our wedding someone gave us (actually gave **her**) two little china angels. They were these two rather pathetic little rosy-cheeked children with wings on their backs. Reni delighted to put them in a place of prominence on our coffee table. I **despised** those wimpy little things.

One evening, after Reni had been out at the church, and I was left home alone, we were having coffee in the living room. She began to stare at those little angels. She grew very silent. A look came over her face that I've actually only seen a couple times since. She went over and picked up those angels like you would cradle a wounded sparrow.

You won't believe what had happened. Someone, (Reni still has no firm proof exactly who) had snapped the wings off those chubby little angels while she was out of the house. They now just looked like innocent little children. All I can say is I was much happier with those wimpy china children than wimpy china angels.

My own opinion is that angels are much mightier in their actual appearance than we think. I know they don't **always** appear as mighty and powerful as in John's vision. But remember, angels can make themselves appear in forms suitable to the purpose of the moment. That's why Paul said that even Satan (who is a fallen angel) can **transform** himself into an angel of light.

So angels can take the form most suitable to the purpose of the moment. The writer of Hebrews tells us that we're to be hospitable to strangers because "**Some have entertained angels unawares**" (Hebrews 13:2). Those angels **must** look just like us or there is no true test of our hospitality to **all** strangers when they appear to be merely human.

The text in **Genesis 18** says "**three men**" came to Abraham and Sarah. It was only **afterwards** that they were recognized as angels. That fits in with the desire of God to have Abraham and Sarah **receive the message** of the visitors in humble **faith**. **Who would have seriously doubted an angelic visitation from the likes of John's towering angel?** The angel at the tomb of Jesus was mistaken for an ordinary man (**Mark 16:5**) because the disciples needed the information the angel would give. And **who would have hung around long enough to listen if confronted by the kind of angel John describes in Revelation 10?**

I think, in their actual heavenly state, angels are of a much more powerful, majestic nature than we imagine them.

John's massive angel isn't there to **entertain**. He's there to **encourage** and **fortify** the heart of this trembling faithful witness, John. In spite of very hellish times - remember the demonic locust-like creatures? - the two hundred million horse-like creatures? - the water turning to blood? - In spite of these things, God is still in control. He will still bring about His plan and purpose. He will bring His church through with power and faithfulness! And little chubby cherubs aren't going to get the job done. John has been shown these bloody visions of the powers of hell. John **needs** to see the greatness of the powers of heaven!

That's the explanation of the following verses: **Revelation 10:4-7** - "And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was

about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down." [5] And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven [6] and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay, [7] but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

John sees this mighty angel taking oath that God is now going to act. He's now going to answer all those prayers of the saints - **Revelation 6:9-10** - "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. [10] They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

The angel in Revelation chapter ten says ***there will be no more delay!*** God was waiting for people still to repent, but it wasn't going to happen - **Revelation 9:20-21** - "The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, [21] nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts."

John's angel swears that the time has come. He swears in the Name of Him who "***...lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay....***" So now we see why the angel stand with one foot in the sea and one foot on the land. ***He represents the one who made the earth and everything in it and the sea and everything in it!*** Absolutely ***everything*** was made by God and ***everything*** will be subdued to His will and plan! "***John, don't ever forget this, no matter what you see going on around you!***"

### 3) **THE SWEETNESS AND BITTERNESS OF DIVINE TRUTH**

**Revelation 10:8-11** - "Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." [9] So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, "Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." [10] And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter. [11] And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."

This is so fascinating. John now becomes ***involved*** in the visions he had been previously just ***observing***. In a way I can't explain, John is now a ***participant*** in the activity of the vision. He is told to take the little book from the angel's hand and eat it. He is told its contents will be ***sweet in his mouth but bitter in his stomach*** (9-10).

And then, the activity of eating this little book and the nature of its contents (both sweet and bitter) are tied in with John's fresh re-commissioning in his prophetic role: **Revelation 10:11** - "And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."

The ***sweetness*** of the little book of prophetic truth is obvious. There is hope of eternal life through Christ Jesus. Never forget, ***it is the slain Lamb from the tribe of Judah who alone can even open the sealed book of God's plan for this whole world.*** We know how this whole story will end. And there is still time for those outside God's grace in Jesus Christ to ***change sides!***

The ***bitterness*** of the contents of the little book is made so plain there is little need for fancy guess-work. The contents of God's revelation must be ***shared***. They must be ***proclaimed***. Notice the wording of **verse 11** - "***...You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.***"

The revelation of Jesus Christ (which is what the book of Revelation is called) won't sit well with Kings and peoples of the nations. This world has its own agenda. And it will not take well to being confronted with truth that calls for repentance. This world kills the prophets like it killed Jesus.

So here's the issue of Revelation chapter 10: ***Are you just in this Christian life for the ride?*** If so, you will never make it. Are you just here tonight because your parents made you come? Are you just here because your friends go out with you after church? Or are you just here because you hope something good will rub off on your kids? Or because you like singing the songs or playing some instrument?

Sooner, rather than later, you're going to have to face the bitterness of living out the whole Word of God in this fallen world. You're going to have to turn around and start swimming upstream. It's going to cost to take a firm stand.

Make that decision while you still have a heart to do so. There comes a time when your life moves beyond repentance: **Revelation 9:20-21** - "The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, [21] nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts."

Stubbornness of heart is far more dangerous to eternal destiny than the tribulation. Keep your heart tender and constantly responsive to the Spirit of God.