

## CHAPTER 10

***"Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, 'Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth.' So I went to the angel and said to him, 'Give me the little book.' And he said to me, 'Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.' Then I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. And he said to me, 'You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings'" (vv. 8-11).***

We have read so far in the Revelation of seven churches, seven seals, and seven trumpets. Here in verses 2-4 of chapter 10 we read of seven thunders:

*He had a little book open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars. When he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices. now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered and do not write them."*

According to Frost, these seven thunders in chapter 10 begin the introduction to a new division. This period comes in at the middle of the seven-year period, the seal and trumpet periods happening before in the first 3 1/2 years and the vial and judgment periods happening afterward in the last 3 1/2 years. In verse six, where the angel states that there shall be no more delay, it is meant to signify that the delay and opportunity granted to sinful men in the first 3 1/2 years shall no longer be given, but rather that men will find grace increasingly giving place to judgment, that is, "divine events will go with a rush, and will end in the direful destruction described both by Paul (2 Thess. 1:7-9) and John (19:11-21)."<sup>1</sup>

McIlvaine observes there is a benign significance to thunder in many passages of Scripture, and therefore writes as follows:

Indeed, what seems most probable to me is, that these thunders revealed to St. John for his great consolation the glories of the Lord's millennial reign; for, as we shall see hereafter, a similar reticence is observed with respect to its particulars, where we should naturally expect the most ample details and the most glowing word-pictures (Rev. xx. 1-6). Hence the joyful haste with which he was about to write and publish what he had heard, when he was prohibited by the voice from heaven. Yet it must be acknowledged that all such conjectures are uncertain; for the appearance of the angel may be otherwise understood, and thunder has not always a gracious significance.<sup>2</sup>

Just as the first six seals were divorced from the seventh by an interlude, so too the first six trumpets are separated from the seventh by an interlude. This interlude encompasses chapters 10 and the first portion of chapter 11. This interlude is "to provide additional information

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1 Frost, *Matthew Twenty-Four and the Revelation*, pp. 200-202.

2 McIlvaine, *Wisdom of the Apocalypse*, pg. 199.

bearing on all the previous events and to prepare the reader for further developments.”<sup>3</sup> We note also in chapter 10 that John seems to actually become an active participant in the revelation itself rather than a mere spectator.

Tregelles thinks chapter 10 is a vision of the Lord’s coming in power and glory, a “preface of blessing” followed by chapters 11, 12, and 13; which give still fuller details of the same judgments John describes before, but restricted to the last 1,260 days of the dispensation, i.e. the last “halfweek” of Daniel (Dan. 9:27). Hence this portion of the Revelation is called “a little book.”<sup>4</sup>

Johnson’s view of chapter 10 is as follows:

The chief import of chapter 10 seems to be a confirmation of John’s prophetic call as v. 11 indicates: “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.” This prophesying should not be understood as merely a recapitulation in greater detail of the previous visions but a further progression of the events connected with the end. Notice the use of the word “kings” instead of “tribes” (as in 5:9; 7:9; 13:7; 14:6). This may anticipate the emphasis on the kings of the earth found in 17:9-12 and elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

Smith believes that this notable descent of Christ

must allude to the scene of horrors introduced by the revolution in France of 1789, which for twenty-five years converted the papal nations of Europe into fields of blood and terror, till the close of the battle of Waterloo! . . . But the horrors of this descent of Christ, and of the seven thunders, are antecedent to, and distinct from the battle of the great day,—the seventh trumpet. And the whole union between Daniel and John, upon this subject, shows that these two events are distinct; . . . These seven thunders terrified the world from the year 1789, for about twenty-five years; till the whirlwind from the north, Dan. xi. 40, prostrated a dynasty of that power, and gave to the world a temporary quietus: and those terrors were indeed mistaken, by many, for the seventh trumpet.<sup>6</sup>

Milligan’s view is that this chapter affords a prelude, so to speak, to chapter 11. Although he does not take the 144,000 as true Jews, his comments, nevertheless, are still of interest.

How probable does it become that the first consolatory vision—that in chap. x.—will relate to the same remnant, though on a lower plane alike of battle and of conquest!

Thus looked at, we have good ground for the supposition that the little book-roll contained indications of judgment about to descend on a Church which had fallen from her high position and practically disowned her Divine Master; while at the same time it assured the faithful remnant within her that they would be preserved,

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3 Johnson, *Revelation*, pg. 496.

4 Tregelles, *The Hope of Christ's Second Coming*, pg. 103.

5 Johnson, *Revelation*, pg. 498.

6 Smith, *Key*, pp. 122, 137, 138.

and in due season glorified. The little book thus spoke of the hardest of all the struggles through which believers have to pass: that with foes of their own household; but, so speaking, it told also of judgment upon these foes, and of a glorious issue for the true members of Christ's Body out of toil and suffering. . .

The effect produced upon the Seer by eating the little roll is also in accord with what has been said. *It shall make thy belly bitter*, it was said to him, *but in thy mouth it shall be sweet as honey*. . . . Such an effect could hardly follow the mere proclamation of judgment on the world. . . . But to think that the Church of the living God, the bride of Christ, shall be visited with judgment, and to be compelled to acknowledge that the judgment is deserved; to think that those to whom so much has been given should have given so little in return; to think of the selfishness which has prevailed where love ought to have reigned, of worldliness where there ought to have been heavenliness of mind, and of discord where there ought to have been unity--these are the things that make the Christian's reflections "bitter;" they, and they most of all, are his perplexity, his burden, his sorrow, and his cross. The world may disappoint him, but from it he expected little. When the Church disappoints him, the "foundations are overturned," and the honey of life is changed into gall and wormwood.

Combining the particulars which have now been noticed, we seem entitled to conclude that the little book-roll of this chapter is a roll of judgment, but of judgment relating less to the world than to the Church.<sup>7</sup>

Contrary to Milligan, Kelly sees the judgment as relating to the Jews:

In the chapter before us there is a difference. It is not a sealed book that we have, but an open one: and it is also emphatically a little book. There is nothing mysterious about the matter. We come here to a notable change in the Revelation. Instead of its being, as hitherto, events that were the secret effects of God's unseen hand, there is a manifestation of His power and purpose with regard to His people. All becomes quite plain. We have no longer symbolical locusts, having a king (cf. Prov. xxx. 27), or strange and strangely numerous horses and horsemen, &c. It is now God's open, brief, and decisive actings. This I apprehend to be the difference between the two books. The first was in the hand of God and sealed, so that none could open it, save the blessed One who suffered all for the glory of God. Here it is an open book, which the prophet takes from the angel's hand; and immediately we have no longer the more secret or enigmatical appearances of earlier visions, but the temple, the holy city, the Gentiles treading it under foot--all an obvious manifestation that God is acting on the Jews. We have before had the sealing a certain number out of the tribes of Israel, scattered, as I suppose, through the whole world. But here (chapter xi.) we come to a smaller scale, where God's dealings are concentrated on Jerusalem, the sanctuary, altar, worshippers, two witnesses, &c., and where they are also brought out so plainly that there need be no mistake as to what God means thereby. The beast as such also appears here in undisguised and tremendous opposition against God and His servants. And

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<sup>7</sup> Milligan, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 163-166.

evidently the Lord Jesus is showing that the time approaches when He must take all into His own hands. This then is an open book, because all that it contains is perfectly plain; and it is a very little book, because but a short time and a narrow compass are contemplated in it.<sup>8</sup>

Verse 7 in this chapter is of special interest. I begin the quote at verse 5 for context:

*The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven and swore by Him who lives forever and ever . . . that there should be delay no longer, but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets.*

What should not be delayed any longer, and what is meant by the mystery of God? Let us turn first to Frost:

Laying hold now upon those mysteries which are most central and important, it is rightful to say that the essential thought of God concerning mystery is related to Christ and the church. In reference to these, it is clear from two passages (Eph. 3:4; Col. 1:26, 27) that Christ is the primary mystery, this as the Head of the members of His body; and it is equally clear from one passage (Eph. 3:3; 5:22) that the church is the secondary mystery, this as a body made up of Jews and Gentiles united together in the Spirit (Eph. 3:1-6). This review of Scripture brings us to the conclusion that the mystery of God spoken of in the tenth chapter is the church, and that the statement, "the mystery of God should be finished," refers to the completion of that body. If this is a correct deduction, it becomes plain that the church continues on earth up to the tenth chapter, and also, according to the words of the verse, unto "the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound" (10:7). In other words, it will be during the first portion of the sounding of the seventh trumpet that the last member of the body of Christ will be saved, and it will be at the same time that the Lord will return and call the living and dead saints to Himself. As the sound of the seventh angel takes place after the Antichrist has been revealed and during the days of the great tribulation, it becomes evident that the church is continued on earth up to and into the tragic events of the Antichrist's reign (11:15; 12:13-17). In confirmation of all of the above, it is instructive to note that the Greek verb here used for "finished" (10:7) is *teleo*, which means to bring the thing in mind, namely, the completion of the church, to a full end. This is the word, in its noun form, which the Lord uses in Matthew twenty-four to describe the same period of time and the same events of experience (Matt. 24:6, 13, 14).<sup>9</sup>

William Kelly writes,

I apprehend that people often gather a vague if not wrong notion from those words, "there shall be time no longer." Many imagine that it means--there was then to be

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<sup>8</sup> Kelly, *Lectures*, pp. 203-204.

<sup>9</sup> Frost, *Matthew Twenty-Four and the Revelation*, pp. 205-206.

an end of time, and eternity was to begin. But this is not at all the sense . . . The meaning is, that God would no longer allow time to run on before He interfered with the course of this world. It is not that eternity was at once to begin, but that there should be no longer any lapse of time before His last summons to the world and the introduction of a new dispensation, in which He will deal in an open manner with men on the earth. . . .

And remark the words in the following verse: "But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he should be about to sound, the mystery of God should be finished," &c. These words at once contradict the thought that eternity was to follow immediately. On the contrary, after this the whole of the millennium comes in; after it a little season, and then eternity. . . .

God will put a stop to the present delay: "the mystery of God" will then be finished. This I take to mean the secret of His allowing Satan to have his own way, and man too (that is to say, the wonder of evil prospering and of good being trodden under foot). . . That is what seems so mysterious a thing to us, when we know God and how He hates evil. But it is soon coming to an end.<sup>10</sup>

Walvoord states,

It is often overlooked, however, that the mystery is said to have been "declared to his servants the prophets" (v. 7). The mystery of God which is declared as subject to fulfillment is unfolded therefore in the Old Testament in the many passages which speak of the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.

The prediction is related to the full manifestation of the divine power, majesty, and holiness of God which will be evident in the glorious return of Christ, the establishment of His millennial kingdom, and the creation of the eternal state which will follow.<sup>11</sup>

Concerning verses 8-11 in particular (quoted at the heading of this chapter), McIlvaine thinks this vision

is a continuation of the last, and is best comprehended under the sixth trumpet in further preparation for the seventh. Here, however, it may be well to recall what has been previously observed, namely, that there is a certain cyclical movement in these successive series of revelations, such that each of them, except the last, covers a great part of the current dispensation. Yet in each succeeding one there is a certain advance beyond the preceding; that is to say, there is an ever increasing effulgence of the divine glory, which bursts forth in all its splendors from the Golden City, "descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God" (Rev. xxi. 11). Moreover, the several series, as they advance, dwell more and more on the things that are nearest to the end, so that we feel ourselves borne irresistibly

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10 Kelly, *Lectures on the Book of Revelation*, pp. 205-207.

11 Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 172.

onwards to the closing scene.<sup>12</sup>

The day of Christ's return will be a time of both judgment and salvation. We close this chapter with Nathaniel West:

The kingdoms will have prepared for themselves the instruments of their own destruction. The logic of the situation will have caused already an effort to reintegrate the jarring nations into one vast empire, as the best solution of the problem of government, a world-empire free from Christianity and bound alone to a religion of humanity, in which the world's last leader will be the chief object of worship, the world's new Messiah. The temporary realization of that scheme with all its wickedness, will provoke the last heaving of the nations and call into being the "Day of the Lord." Supernatural terrors will break in on the new order of things, more void of order than all preceding times. "Heaven, earth, sea and the dry land will be shaken" (Hag. 2:6,7). It will be a time of tribulation and anguish of slaughter and gloom, and of persecution of God's saints, a time when the sickle, the flail, the fan, and the fire will do their work, a time when the harvest is ripe, and the vintage so full that the vats overflow, "because the wickedness is great" (Joel 3:13). . . . Then, "the Son of Man shall come in His glory and all the holy angels with Him, and He shall sit on the throne of His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations." . . . Nature herself will shudder, and sun, moon and stars refuse to look on the butchery, and through the darkness that shrouds the hour the flash of the Advent will kindle the sky, and glare on the concert of crime below, and earth's monarchs, magnates and millionaires, her statesmen and diplomatists, the commanders of her armies and fleets in all waters--all the great, rich and mighty, bond and free--will "call on the rocks and mountains to hide them from the face of Him who sits upon the throne, and from the Wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:12-17).<sup>13</sup>

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12 McIlvaine, *Wisdom*, pg. 202.

13 Nathaniel West, *Daniel's Great Prophecy. The Eastern Question. The Kingdom*, pp. 58-59.