

Lesson 24

Last week we looked verses 4-7 of Chapter 10, and we looked in detail at the mystery of God in verse 7.

Chapter 10 is here to provide comfort to the persecuted Christians, and that is exactly what we have seen so far in this chapter. A mighty angel has sworn that the mystery of God declared by the prophets is about to be finished without delay!

Yes, Rome had played an important role in God's plan to redeem the world — but that role was over. The final prophetic puzzle pieces about Rome would soon be put in place. Rome had had its day, but that day was at an end. God would very soon be finished with Rome!

Revelation 10:8-11

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

In verse 4, a voice from heaven told John to seal up what he had heard uttered by the seven thunders. In verse 8, that same voice tells John to go and take the little book that was being held by the mighty angel.

That mighty angel had come from the presence of God to announce that there would be no more delay, but that the mystery of God would be finished when the seventh trumpet began to sound. This angel also brought a small open book, and part of the angel's message was in that book.

The first thing we should notice in verse 8 is that John was not **given** the book. Instead, John was told to **go and take** the book. Why is that distinction important? Because it emphasizes John's personal commitment to undertake the responsibility of faithfully recording and faithfully proclaiming God's message.

Remember, John was at this moment suffering exile because of his testimony about Jesus (1:9). Once he was finally released, did God really expect him to start proclaiming the word once again and risk being exiled once again, or worse? Yes. And John's actions in these verses show us that John readily accepted that charge from God.

This part of the scene is intended to remind us of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Both were willing to suffer for proclaiming God's word — and both indicated that willingness by eating God's word, Jeremiah figuratively and Ezekiel literally.

***Jeremiah 15:16-17** — Thy words were found, **and I did eat them**; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts. I sat not in the assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced; I sat alone because of thy hand: for thou hast filled me with indignation.*

***Ezekiel 2:8-3:3** — But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: **open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee**. And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe. Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, **eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel**. So I opened my mouth, and **he caused me to eat that roll**. And he*

said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.

As did Jeremiah and Ezekiel, John eats the book to show his acceptance of this responsibility. He makes God's message a part of himself.

There's a lesson here that we shouldn't miss. **No one will ever listen to us proclaim a message that we ourselves are not living.** The first step I must take if I want to be an effective proclaimer of God's word is to make God's word a part of myself — just as if I had eaten it. The word must be inside me and be a part of me, so that when the world hears me and sees me, they will hear and see God's word. I must be inseparable from the word of God. Yes, I must **know** it, but I must also **show** it.

Colossians 3:16 — Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.

John 15:7 — If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

In verse 9, John is told what he should expect when he eats the book — “it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey.” Verse 10 tells us that John experienced just what he had been promised when he ate the book — “it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.”

Bitter and sweet — what does that mean? It means that whatever is in that scroll, it contains some bad news and some good news.

What was the bad news? We know what that was. The church would continue to suffer great persecution at the hands of Rome. That persecution did not suddenly end when Rome was judged. In fact, it never ended. The persecutors come and go, and the level of persecution increases and decreases, but there is never a time when there is no persecution. “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). And at this time the persecution was severe. John would continue to suffer, as would those faithful Christians who heard his message.

John 15:19 — If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but

*I have chosen you out of the world, therefore **the world hateth you.***

But there was also good news in the little book. The scroll was also sweet. What was the good news? The church would triumph over Rome. Those Christians who were faithful unto death would receive a crown of life. Just as Daniel had foretold centuries earlier, the eternal kingdom of God would sweep away all the kingdoms of this world — including Rome.

Don't we see both the bitter and the sweet in Revelation 2?

Revelation 2:10 — *Fear none of those things which **thou shalt suffer**: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee **a crown of life.***

Yes, victory was promised. But that victory involved suffering, tribulation, and death. Both bitter and sweet.

There's another lesson here that we shouldn't miss. The bitter and the sweet go together — and we should not expect to have one without the other. Some of us want just the sweet, but we are not willing to suffer the bitter. Others trudge through the Christian life as if the bitter was all there is, not recognizing the wonderful sweetness that God's provides.

Why was the **sweetness** in the **mouth**, while the **bitterness** was in the **stomach**? Perhaps we are intended to recall the Psalmist.

Psalm 119:103 — *How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!*

Or perhaps we are intended to recall the stern message of Hebrews 6 to those who would fall away from Christ.

Hebrews 6:4-6 — *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have **tasted of the heavenly gift**, and were **made partakers of the Holy Ghost**, And have **tasted the good word of God**, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.*

Verse 11 tells us something else about John's message — it would be prophesied “again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.” **What does that mean?**

First, the word “**before**” that I read from the KJV is better translated “**about.**” That is, instead of being told that he would prophecy **before** many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings, John is being told that he will prophecy **about** many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings. That is how the ESV translates the verse: “You must again prophesy **about** many peoples and nations and languages and kings.”

Second, this statement reminds us of something we have already seen back in Chapter 5.

***Revelation 5:9-10** — And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of **every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation**; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.*

Except for “kings” in place of “kindred,” the categories in Revelation 10:11 are the same as the categories in Revelation 5:9. Who were the tongues, the peoples, and the nations in Revelation 5:9? If we are talking about the first century church that God had redeemed by the blood of Christ, then the tongues, the peoples, and the nations in Revelation 5:9 were tongues, peoples, and nations in Rome. Isn't that what we saw in Acts 2?

***Acts 2:9-11** — Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians.*

Those were all part of Rome or, at least for the Parthians, close enough that some of their citizens found themselves in Jerusalem in Acts 2. Yes, the population that heard John and the other apostles were almost entirely Roman, but they were also of many peoples and nations and tongues.

So what does that tell us about Revelation 10:11? It tells us that we need not look outside of Rome to find many peoples and nations and tongues. Acts 2

proves that with absolute certainty. The Roman empire was composed of many peoples and many nations and many tongues. Remember how Luke described Rome.

*Luke 2:1 — And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that **all the world** should be taxed.*

What about the **many kings** in verse 11? They are the first eleven emperors of Rome, and we are about to study all about them later in this book. But it is not the first time we have met them — we also read about them in our study of Daniel.

But couldn't verse 11 mean that John's message in this book is all about the many peoples and nations and tongues and kings that would rise and fall in the centuries between when the book was written and the world comes to an end? **No.**

It can't mean that. Why? Because this book is telling us over and over again that it concerns things that were to shortly come to pass. Verse 11 can't concern things that have not yet come to pass even two thousand years later unless we are willing to ignore the numerous verses to the contrary. Verse 11 is not the only verse in this book! We must study verse 11 in its context.

And another thing — the little book that has this message for the many peoples and nations and tongues and kings came from the mighty angel. And what had that mighty angel just done in verses 5-6? He had raised his hand before God and proclaimed that there would be **no more delay!** Are we really going to add 2000 years and counting worth of delay in verse 11? Let's believe what the angel said — the time for delay was over!

Chapter 11

Revelation 11:1-2

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. 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.

Here is how Barclay describes this chapter:

It has been said that Chapter 11 is at one and the same time the most difficult and the most important chapter in Revelation.

I'm not certain I agree with either assessment, although this is a difficult chapter. Perhaps we should begin just by listing the symbols that we see in the first four verses (two of which we just read, and two verses we will read shortly):

- A reed like unto a rod used to measure the temple, the altar, and the worshippers.
- The court outside not measured but given unto the Gentiles.
- The holy city.
- 42 months.
- Two witnesses.
- 1260 days.
- Two olive trees.
- Two candlesticks.

That's eight symbols in just the first four verses! Before we dive in, let's note a few helpful guidelines.

There is no reason to expect a **change in context** as we move into Chapter 11. If we have been looking at the conflict between Rome and the church in the first ten chapters, then we are likely still looking at that conflict here.

The **time frame** of the book applies to Chapter 11 as it does to all of the other chapters. This chapter describes things that were to shortly come to pass (1:1, 1:3, 22:6, 22:10). Remember what the mighty angel said in verse 6 — the time for delay was over!

This book is **not** about Jerusalem. For starters, the book itself tells us that it was written **after** the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. And if the book is about Jerusalem (as some suggest), then why does it begin the letters to seven churches of Asia Minor? We noticed in our discussion of 10:7 that God was very **soon** to be finished with Rome — by the time of this book, God was **already** finished with Jerusalem.

This book is all about the **new Jerusalem** — the church. So if we see symbols here that make us think of Jerusalem, we should immediately check to see whether they apply instead to the new Jerusalem, the church.

This book is intended to provide **comfort** to the church during a time of intense persecution by Rome. As we enter Chapter 11, we are still in the interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets — and that interlude is specifically intended to assure the Christians of their position, their spiritual safety, their spiritual deliverance, and their spiritual victory.

And with that, let's fasten our seatbelts and get started with Chapter 11!

Many terrible things are in store for Rome. The seventh trumpet, which is the third woe announced by the eagle, is about to sound, and we will soon see the seven bowls of God's wrath poured out on Rome. Chapter 11 begins by considering the question of what was to become of God's faithful servants during these great trials and tribulations. **Would they be protected? Would they be safe?**

One of the themes of this book is that **God knows**. In each of the seven letters in Chapters 2-3, Jesus said, "I know." Earlier we saw God's people being sealed in advance of the tribulation — which we compared to God writing his name on his people. God knows who his faithful people are, and God knows who they are not.

*2 Timothy 2:19 — Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, **The Lord knoweth them that are his.***

The opening verses of Chapter 11 show us this fact using the symbol of a **measuring rod**. When a surveyor measures an area, that measurement creates a **separation** into two parts — the part inside the measured area and the part outside the measured area. And after the surveyor's measurement is made, there is no longer any doubt about what is inside the area and what is outside the area. The image here is of a surveyor being sent to measure the house of God.

Where else have we seen this imagery?

In Ezekiel's vision of the restored temple, a measuring rod was used to make a separation between what is holy and what is common.

***Ezekiel 42:19-20** — He turned about to the west side, and measured five hundred reeds with the measuring reed. He measured it by the four sides: it had a wall round about, five hundred reeds long, and five hundred broad, to make a separation between the sanctuary and the profane place.*

We also saw this symbol in our study of Zechariah.

***Zechariah 2:1-5** — I lifted up mine eyes again, and looked, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof. And, behold, the angel that talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him, And said unto him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.*

Where the measurement in Ezekiel was intended to show the **division** between the holy and the profane, the measurement in Zechariah (as we discussed when we studied that chapter) was intended to show God's **protection** of his people. Both of those concepts are involved here in Revelation 11 — the **separation** between the church and those outside the church, and God's **protection** of his church.

What is John told to measure? The temple, the altar, and those who worship in the temple. The Greek word for temple used here indicates the inner sanctuary where only priests were allowed. It is not the Greek word denoting the entire temple with all of its buildings, courts, and porches.

Which temple is John told to measure? Is it the old Jewish temple in Jerusalem? We know that isn't the temple in view here. Why? Because by the time of this vision, that temple had already been weighed in the balances, found want-

ing, and destroyed! **To measure the old Jewish temple at this time you would need a *backhoe* rather than a measuring rod!**

This temple is not the *old* dwelling place of God in the old Jewish temple — this temple is instead the *new* dwelling place of God in the church. What we are seeing here is yet another beautiful description of the church — this time as a **measured temple** of worshipers, **separated** from the world and under God's **protection**.

And isn't that exactly what we would **expect** to see? Would it make any sense at all in the context of the first 10 chapters for John to suddenly be told to measure the old (now destroyed) Jewish temple in the old (now destroyed) city of Jerusalem? How would that provide any comfort to the poor persecuted Christians in Asia Minor?

Let's let Paul describe the temple that is being measured here:

***Ephesians 2:18-22** — For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto **an holy temple** in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

Let's let Peter tell us what it is:

***1 Peter 2:5-6** — Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.*

The **altar** in verse 1 is a reminder of what prompted this judgement against Rome.

***Revelation 6:9-10** — And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the **altar** the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, say-*

ing, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

The church was **sealed** in Revelation 7:3, the church was **numbered** in Revelation 7:4, and now the church is **measured** in Revelation 11:1.

Does God care what happens to the church? Absolutely! These images show God taking great interest in and care of his church. He marks them, he numbers them, he measures them. **Does Jesus care?** “Oh, yes, He cares, I know He cares, His heart is touched with my grief; When the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Savior cares.” That’s the message of verse 1!

And let’s make one point perfectly clear — **God’s measurement is the only measurement that matters.** It does not matter how the world measures us, and it does not matter how we measure ourselves. What matters is how God measures us. If we fall short on God’s scale, it matters not how we fall on the scales of men.

*1 Corinthians 4:3-4 — But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but **he that judgeth me is the Lord.***

The only judgment that matters is the judgment of Christ. And the only judgment of Christ that we ever want to hear applied to us is “Well done, thou good and faithful servant!” If we can just hear those words from our Savior, then it matters not what the world has thought of us.

What is the court in verse 2?

The ancient tabernacle had one court (Exodus 27:9). Solomon’s temple had an inner court (1 Kings 6:36), an outer court (1 Kings 7:12), a court for the priests (2 Chronicles 4:9), and an upper court (Jeremiah 36:10). Herod’s temple also had multiple courts, with the great court eventually being called the court of the Gentiles because it was open to everyone.

The temple in John’s vision has only one court as far as we are told, and John is told **not** to measure that court. In fact, the Greek word translated “leave out” in verse 2 can literally mean to **cast out** by force.

Why is this court not measured? If measuring something means that God is protecting that thing and separating that thing from what is common, then

not measuring something means that thing not measured is left unprotected and unseparated. **Why is this court left unprotected and unseparated?**

To answer that question, we need to first ask another question: **what is represented by this court?** We have a big clue to help us answer that question — whatever this court is, we know it is **not measured**.

God is measuring his people so that they will know they are known by God, are important to God, and are protected by God. God is measuring his people to show that they are holy and that they are separate from what is not holy. **Those who are measured have chosen Christ over Caesar; those who are not measured have chosen Caesar over Christ.**

So what does the court in verse 2 represent? It represents those **outside** the church. Once again, we see the **two paths** — the path to life and the path to death. We see **two groups** — those in Christ, and those out of Christ.

This view is confirmed by what we read next in verse 2 — “for it [the court] is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.”

Who are the Gentiles in verse 2? This question is easy. If the church is the new Jerusalem, then who are the true Jews today? Paul answered that question for us:

Romans 2:29 — But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Galatians 3:7 — Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

Figuratively, the church is the new Jerusalem, and Christians are the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16) and the children of Abraham (Galatians 3:7). So then who, figuratively, are the **Gentiles**? Those **outside** of the church. Those **outside** of Christ. And that is just what we would expect to see because verse 2 tells us that the unmeasured court has been given unto the Gentiles — they are outside the church.

What does it mean that the Gentiles will tread the holy city? What is the holy city? Let’s start with second question first.

The holy city in verse 2 is, once again, the church. It is the new Jerusalem, the new dwelling place of God’s people under the new covenant.

Revelation 21:2 — *And I John saw **the holy city**, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

But I thought the **temple** in verse 1 was the church. How can the **entire city** now also be the church in verse 2? Because God is using symbol after symbol to show us how he sees the church. This book uses many different symbols to depict the church — we have already seen many of them in the first 10 chapters, and we will see many more. We have two of those beautiful symbols in these two verses — the church is the **temple** (Ephesians 2:21) and the church is the **holy city**, the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2). In this book, it is **never** a proper objection to say that we are being shown too many different symbols representing the church!

But what about the second question — what does it mean that **the Gentiles will tread the holy city**? What that means is that the church was having and was going to continue to have a very rough time. Yes, the church enjoyed all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3), but **physically** the church was suffering, and that suffering would soon get worse under Domitian. The church was being run over by the Romans. **Would it last forever?** Verse 2 says no. It would not last forever — it would last for only 42 months.

What does it mean that the holy city will be tread by the Gentiles for 42 months? We know that numbers are used figuratively in this book. (How else can we explain any army of 200 million soldiers?) So the real question is what does 42 represent? What does that symbol mean?

The first thing we should note about this symbol is that it is one we will see again in this book, although sometimes it will be shown in different terms.

Here in verse 2 we see **42 months**. In the very next verse we will see **1260 days**. In Revelation 12:14, we will see “**a time, and times, and half a time.**” How are all of those the same symbol? Because 42 months, at thirty days per month, is 1260 days. And because 42 months is three and a half years, which is what is meant by “a time, and times, and half a time” — a year, two years, and half a year.

We also saw this symbol in our study of Daniel. In Daniel 7:25 and 12:7, **three and a half years** was the period of time during which the little horn (Domitian) and Rome would persecute God’s people.

So what do we know so far about the 42 months in verse 2? We know that is it being used figuratively, we know this same figure is used elsewhere in the book, and we know that it is the same as three and a half years.

What does this symbol depict? Remember how we answered that question when we were looking at the 144,000. We **unravelled** 144,000 to see how it is related to symbols that we know — such as twelve and ten. Here we will do the same thing. Is three and a half related to some symbol that we already know? Yes — three and a half is a **broken seven**. It is half of seven — and seven is a symbol for perfection that runs all throughout the book of Revelation.

God is hitting Rome in waves of seven — seven seals, seven trumpets, and soon seven bowls. And Rome? **Rome is hitting the church with a broken seven!**

Rome can never inflict damage on the church in anyway that is similar to the damage that God can inflict on Rome. Rome may think it has a giant club with which to pummel the church — but that club is just a broken seven. God's club is a true seven — and **no one gets up when God swings that club!** Rome can't pour seven bowls of wrath on the church! Rome doesn't have seven of anything to use as a weapon against the church!

The symbol of a persecution lasting three and half years is a beautiful image for a persecution that is just **temporary** — a persecution that cannot destroy the church, unlike how God is about to destroy Rome. Yes, God's people will be persecuted, but that persecution will **not** last forever, and God will **sustain** his people throughout that persecution.

And doesn't that interpretation fit the context perfectly? Does it make any sense at all to read verse 2 and then get our calendar out and count off a literal 42 months? The so-called "rigid literalism" of the premillennialist strips all of the beauty and meaning from the text.

But why do we see the **variations** in how this symbol is used? Why do we see 42 **months** here, 1260 **days** in the next verse, and three and half **years** elsewhere? Why not just always used the same symbol?

My **first answer** to that question is to ask why Van Gogh used so many different colors. Why so many shades of green? Why not just use the same tube of green paint every time? God is painting us some beautiful pictures in this book — maybe we shouldn't question his color choices!

A **second answer** to that question is that the switch from years to months to days may be intended to cast a slightly different shade on **how temporary** the

persecution will be or will seem. Maybe a switch from years to months makes the persecution seem even more temporary.