

Category: New Testament File Name: Revelations.Little Scroll  
Welcome the little scroll!  
Revelation Chapter 10

The following are O.T. background passages and themes that are the raw material for this chapter:

*"You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious. But yoy, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you." Then I looked and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe. And he said to m, "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it." So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as money in my mouth. (Ezek 2:7-3:3)*

*The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time.... Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end." (Daniel 12:7-10)*

*[He] is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him... (Romans 16:25-26)*

*Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. I became a servant of this gospel...(Eph 3:2-7)*

I like this chapter a lot, especially v. 7. "In the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets." We would like to know more! It refers to a pivotal time. As God is the creator and author of history, the accomplishment of his mystery is of great importance.

What makes this special? The context of this announcement, the O.T. allusions and meaning of the words will reveal why this announcement can inspire and excite us even today.

The seventh angel  
The timing  
The scroll  
The mystery of God

### ***"The seventh angel"***

The book of Revelation passes through several recognisable phases. The first three chapters and most of the last (22<sup>nd</sup>) chapter are book-ends, and are in the form of a letter (or letters) to the Christian church. Chapters 4 and 5 show us the throne room of God the creator and redeemer, and chapter 21 the new city of God. These chapters (4, 5 and 21) are largely descriptive of places. Imbetween (chapters 6 to 20) there is enough action to fill every screen of a Warner Village cinema to capacity! The seventh angel fits into this action section.

The seventh angel happens to be the last in a series of angels. The number seven comes frequently in the book of Revelation, but not only in the book of Revelation. There are seven lampstands in Jesus' presence in chapter 1 (v. 19) which we are told are the seven churches. Jesus holds seven stars in his right hand, which are the seven angels of the churches (also v. 19). Seven letters are then penned by John at Jesus' instruction to seven churches in Asian Minor. However, from Genesis we are given a 7

day week, in the Torah there was to be a moratorium on debt in the seventh year, and a special Jubilee on the 7x7th (+1) i.e. 50<sup>th</sup> year in the Jewish calendar.<sup>1</sup> The seven-fold voice of God speaks in Psalm 29. For the Jew, seven was the number of perfection (or sometimes completion).

A basic structural hook in Revelation on which God's judgment on the world and Rome in particular is based is the number seven. Chapter 6 begins with the successive opening of seven seals on a scroll, each of which releases a new horror on the earth. In chapter 8, seven angels appear each with a trumpet. As each angel blows his trumpet in turn, new horrors are released on the earth. In chapters 15 and 16, seven more angels appear, each with a golden bowl full of the wrath of God (15:7) These are expressed to be the last, "because with them God's wrath is completed." (15:1) Each bowl is poured out in turn, releasing a succession of plagues on the earth. This hook is the basic structure for chapters 6 to 16, and after this, things move on.

A few comments should be made on these sevenfold judgments.

1. The O.T. context and God's right to judge. Many of them mirror Moses' plagues on Egypt.<sup>2</sup>
2. The O.T. context and the form of the judgment accounts. I do not believe the judgments are meant to be a list of 21 separate successive historical events which we should be looking to see fulfilled in whole or in part in our day or even in history up to our own day.<sup>3</sup> This belief is strongly influenced by the discovery of a passage in Leviticus where the Jews are warned of the consequences of disobedience.<sup>4</sup> In Lev 26:14-39, God warns four times of judgments that will be "seven times over". But it would be strained literalism to look for seven instances of cannibalism following seven instances of military defeat, and no more and no less. The multiplication of judgment by seven is best understood as being a sevenfold underlining of the warning. The similarities to my mind with Revelation are too close to be ignored. The three series of sevenfold judgments in Revelation are by analogy not to be taken as successive, but in parallel. They are a compounding warning of God's judgment. This can be overwhelming, as bank interest can be! In banking, interest can be calculated on a simple, or compound basis. In simple interest, the same amount of interest is added each year because it is based on the original sum lent. In compound, the interest is based each year on the whole amount outstanding, including the interest! You pay interest on your interest! This can indeed be overwhelming, and if in doubt you are advised not to try to find out!
3. In the case of the first and second runs of judgment (the seals and the trumpets), there is an unexpected hiatus (or gap) just before the final deluge. Each time the effect is to intensify the expectation of the final judgment, and each time the gap is used as a window to show us how the church is faring in the midst of this judgment. Just as the Hebrews in Egypt were protected from the plagues on the Egyptians (by the seal of the blood of the lamb in the case of the angel of death), we find the church wonderfully protected in Revelation. Before the seventh seal, we

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<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 25:1-55

<sup>2</sup> Christians may want to apologise for the blood and guts of the plagues of Revelation unless they remember the plagues' origin in the Exodus. The purpose of the plagues was not punishment. The purpose was to soften Pharaoh's heart. He was an owner and oppressor of God's people. God urged him to give due respect and release to the Hebrews, first orally and then in a succession of plagues. Sadly his heart was so hard that he paid for it with the death of his first-born. Egypt in Revelation is normally Rome (but can also be Jerusalem) and speaks of oppression of God's people and refusing to allow them freedom to worship the one true God and the Lamb, Jesus. God's desire is not to punish, but repentance. (Ezekiel 18:31) Sadly, repentance did not come until too late for Pharaoh, and on an ominous note, John also records the failure by the oppressors in his day to repent as plague upon plague descends (9:20,21) The readers are prepared for the worst.

<sup>3</sup> On the speculative view, please see elsewhere (to be written)

<sup>4</sup> The section begins ( Lev. 26:14) "If you will not listen to me..., then I will do this to you [disease, crop failure, military defeat]" It is compounded in 26:18 "If after all this, you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over [barrenness of land]" It is compounded a second time in 26:21 "If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve. [wild animals unrestrainable] Then, in verse 23, "If in spite of these things you do not accept my correction but continue to be hostile toward me, I myself will be hostile toward you and will afflict you for your sins seven times over. [military disaster]" One final time, in verse 27, God repeats his warning of sevenfold judgment [cannibalism]

suddenly see the mark of protection put on all the disciples and a crowd beyond number dressed in white holding palm branches. Praise God, the church is safe!

4. Just before the seventh trumpet is blown by the seventh angel, another mighty angel leaps into the scene. He carries the little scroll and is a character of promise. We also meet the two witnesses, characters of hope, with prayers as powerful as Elijah and Moses. They are the Church. Amen!

We have been looking at chapter 10 and the message of the mighty angel. He tells us the mystery of God will be accomplished in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet. Hopefully these comments on the seventh angel, his place in the series of judgments and the observations on the gap between the sixth and seventh judgments has been enlightening. There is much more that could be said, but interest level must be balanced with thoroughness and so this is offered as an introduction.

### ***The timing***

We have not quoted the message of the mighty angel in full. He begins his message before verse 7 saying, “There will be no more delay!”. Timing is, like the number seven, an issue on which the O.T. sheds much light. What O.T. passages are relevant here?

First, the similarity of the mighty angel with a character in the book of Daniel would not go unnoticed by the well-versed Jewish reader of John’s prophecy. The relevant passage is set out above. There are several similarities:

There are a number of differences. Here we focus on the question of timing. The angel/man in linen told Daniel that there would be a delay before the fulfilment of his message. Distinctions made by John are highlighted by the similarities, and are calculated to jar with the reader who knew the flow of the Daniel passage. It is a clever technique.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The talk of “technique” may disturb some. In the writing of Holy Scripture, inspired by the Holy Spirit, what place does the mind of the writer have in construction of his material? Is it not just “accidental” (to man’s mind) that the number seven recurs? Is it not that way because that is what John actually saw in his vision? And if he had a vision, how can one speak of technique? He is simply describing what he saw! (Rev 1:2) It may surprise some to know that even top scholars not noted for their conservatism may admit to this being a dream scene (Chris Rowland). However, we should not have a problem if it is the case that John has chosen a dream as his vehicle (per Bornkamm) noting that John Bunyan did exactly the same thing in *Pilgrim’s Progress*. In the book, Bunyan insists it was all a dream that he saw, yet few, if any, of us really believe it was all a dream.