

Lesson 23

Last week when we ended we had just started looking at verses 4-7 of Chapter 10. These difficult verses are important verses to our understanding of the rest of the book, so we will need to take our time and proceed carefully.

The handout for today's lesson (available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com) is a slightly revised version of a handout that I used last year for two of our special Wednesday night classes on current issues. For a detailed look at this handout, please listen to those two lessons available at ThyWordIsTruth.com. We will have a few things to say about the handout in today's lesson as well — a particularly with how Revelation 10:7 fits into the handout.

At the end of verse 3, the powerful angel from God cried out with a loud voice, and the seven thunders uttered their voices. What did the seven thunders say?

John was about to tell us, but in verse 4 he was told instead to “seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.” In verse 6, John tells us what the angel said, but he does not tell us what the seven thunders said.

Last week we looked at several possibilities for why we were not told what the seven thunders said. With each of those possibilities, we were reminded of the **time frame** for this book — it concerns things that were shortly to come to pass (1:1, 1:3, 22:6, 22:10). Perhaps the voices of these seven thunders were not revealed in this book because these seven voices concerned things that were **not** shortly to come to pass. That theory fits nicely with what Daniel was told in Daniel 8:26 (“shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days”).

We'll have more to say about the seven thunders in a moment, but let's look first at what the angel said. That was the cliff hanger we ended with last week. The angel's message comes in several parts, including from the little book that he is carrying.

This angel was the mighty angel we saw in verses 1-3 who was on a special mission from God. In fact, we listed eight reasons why we know that this angel was on a mission of utmost importance from God. What did the angel say? What was that all-important message from God?

We see that message in verses 6-7, but first in verse 5 the angel lifts his hand to heaven. This raised hand signifies that what is being done or said is taking

place in full view of heaven, and it emphasizes the solemn and momentous nature of what is being said.

Hailey: “A more solemn oath could not be imagined as the angel swears by the eternity and omnipotence of God.”

Few statements in the Bible have as much of an advance build-up as does the statement in verses 6-7. No one can possibly have any misgivings about the importance and gravity of what this angel is about to say. So what is the message? What does the angel say?

As we read in the KJV, in verse 6 the angel swears before God “that there should be **time** no longer.” **What does that mean?**

The Greek word translated as “time” in that verse by the KJV is the word **chronos**. It *might* mean that there will be no more time (as the KJV suggests), but it much more likely means that there will be no more delay (as most newer translations suggest, and as most Greek scholars such as Vine, Arndt, Gingrich, and Vincent affirm). The Greek word **chronos** means a space of time, so to say there will be no more **chronos** is to say that there will be no more **delay**. Here are some other translations of the phrase.

- **ASV:** “There shall be **delay** no longer.”
- **ESV:** “That there would be no more **delay.**”
- **NAS:** “That there shall be **delay** no longer.”
- **RSV:** “That there should be no more **delay.**”
- **NKJ:** “That there should be **delay** no longer.”

In addition to being supported by Greek scholars, that interpretation fits perfectly with the context and the time frame given elsewhere in this book. It also fits perfectly with what the angel says in verse 7, and it fits perfectly with the description of the seventh trumpet in 11:14 — “behold, the third woe cometh **quickly.**”

So what then do we see in verse 6? We see a mighty angel, having come straight from the presence of God, standing on earth and on sea, raising his hand, and swearing before God that there will be no more delay!

On what basis do so many today insert a delay of two thousand years and counting? And having **added** that delay to the text, how do they avoid then avoid the prophecy of Revelation 22:18 — “If any man shall **add** unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book”? And

what would such a man-made delay say about this solemn oath appealing to the eternity and power of God and proclaiming that there will be no more delay?

Was there a delay or wasn't there a delay? Countless commentators tell us there was a delay. The mighty angel from God swears there is no delay. **I know whom I believe!** I'm with the mighty angel!

What else does the angel say? Look at verse 7. After swearing there will be no more delay, the angel then says, "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." **What is this mystery of God that was declared to the prophets?**

A **mystery** in the Bible is usually something that was **previously** not understood but that has **now** been revealed. A mystery in the Bible is something unexpected and unknown to men unless it is revealed to man by God. God's plan of redemption, for example, is called a mystery in Ephesians 1:9-12, Ephesians 3:8-12, 1 Corinthians 2:7-8, and Colossians 1:25-27.

What mystery is in view here?

Before we answer that question, let's ask another question. This book was written late in the reign of the Roman emperor Vespasian. Could God have at that time sent fire down from heaven to completely destroy the Roman empire as he had completely destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah? **No — God could not have destroyed Rome during the reign of Vespasian.** Why? Two reasons:

John 10:35 — The scripture cannot be broken.

Hebrews 6:18 — It was impossible for God to lie.

But how do those two verses tell us that God could not have wiped Rome off the map during the reign of Vespasian? Because Daniel and Paul had both written about the emperor Domitian — **and Domitian had not yet come to power.**

Daniel 7:25-26 — And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time. But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 — *Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition. Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.*

Those prophecies about Domitian had not yet come to pass when this book was being written. If God had destroyed Rome prior to the reign of Domitian, then both Daniel and Paul would have been proven a false prophet. The Roman empire had to last at least through the reign of Domitian or else the scripture would have been broken. God could not have wiped Rome off the map at the time this book was written and been true to his word through the prophet Daniel and through the Apostle Paul.

So what is the mystery in verse 7?

Once again, before we answer that question, let's consider another question: we know that Jesus will someday return to judge and then destroy this world. Can that last great day occur at any time? Yes, which is why we must always be watchful and ready for his appearance. **But has that always been the case?** Has it always been true that Jesus could return at any time? Could Jesus, for example, have returned to judge the world on the very next day after his ascension? **No.** How do we know that? Two reasons:

John 10:35 — *The scripture cannot be broken.*

Hebrews 6:18 — *It was impossible for God to lie.*

Jesus himself told his followers in Acts 1 about things that had not yet happened but that were going to happen, and so Jesus could not return before those things happened. Jesus had foretold the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 in Matthew 24, and so Jesus could not return until that event happened. The Old Testament contained prophecies about Rome that had not yet come to pass, and so Christ could not return until those things happened.

So when could it be said that Jesus could return at any moment? It could not yet be said when Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians, because in that book Paul wrote the **opposite**: “for that day shall not come, **except** there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition” (2:2-4). **So what was the dividing line?** At what point could it no longer be said that that “that day shall not come, **except**”?

In my opinion, the answer to that question is the same as the answer to our other question: what is the mystery in verse 7 that should be finished?

Whatever that mystery is, we know that it is something we can read about elsewhere in the Bible. Whatever that mystery is, we know it is not something new that has never been revealed to us before. **How do we know that?** Because of verse 7 — God had declared this mystery “to his servants the prophets.” Whatever this mystery is, it must be something we can find in the prophets.

And we know something else about this mystery — **we know that this mystery is finished.** When verse 7 was written, the mystery was not yet finished, but verse 6 tells us there would be no delay. And verse 7 says that the mystery would be finished when the seventh trumpet began to sound — something that Revelation 11:14 was in John’s day coming quickly! And the time frame of the book — repeated twice in Chapter 1 and twice in Chapter 22 — confirms that this mystery was finished shortly after the vision was received.

So what mystery did the prophets declare that was just about to be finished when this vision was received? I think the mystery must include the scheme of redemption and the coming of Christ to bless the entire world and establish his eternal kingdom. The real question for us is when was that mystery finished? What we see in verse 7 is the **ending point** of the mystery. What was that ending point — keeping in mind that whatever it is, it must be something declared by the prophets and something that was soon to occur.

We have three candidates:

1. God’s judgment of Rome.
2. The church’s triumph over Rome.
3. The judgment and death of Domitian.

And those three candidates are, of course, all related. Each was declared by the prophets — Daniel and Zechariah, in particular, as well as by the Apostle Paul. And each had already occurred or was about to occur without delay as proclaimed by the angel in Chapter 10 and by the time frame given repeatedly in the book of Revelation. **In my opinion, the end of the mystery was the death of Domitian in AD 96.**

But wait, someone might say, Rome was very much alive and well at the end of the first century. Domitian’s death in AD 96 was not the end of Rome. The Roman empire in the West continued until AD 476 with the sacking of the

city of Rome, and the Roman empire in the East continued until 1453 with the fall of Constantinople. And what about Constantine who became emperor in AD 324? Didn't Constantine convert to Christianity? Wasn't that really the church's triumph over Rome?

Let's deal with each of those objections in turn.

First, one thing this book tells us about Rome is that **God was finished with Rome** by the end of the first century. What do I mean by finished? I mean that by the death of Domitian in AD 96, the following events had occurred:

- Rome had conquered Greece, according to prophecy.
- Rome had grown to become a great military power, according to prophecy.
- The Roman peace had provided the perfect cradle for Christ to come into the world and for his gospel to spread across the known world, according to prophecy.
- The Jews had, by Roman hands, killed the Son of God, according to prophecy.
- Rome had destroyed Jerusalem, according to prophecy.
- Rome had persecuted the church, according to prophecy.
- Nero and Domitian, and their dynasties, had been completely destroyed, according to prophecy.

In short, the prophecies about Rome had run out! And that meant that Rome was suddenly disposable!

Yes — to the world it appeared that Rome was alive and well at the end of the first century — **but all is not what it seems!** By the end of the first century, Rome had been weighed in the scales and found wanting. Rome had been sentenced to death! God had given them up and given them over. Rome's role in God's plan was finished. We will have much more to say about the end of Rome as we proceed through the remainder of the book.

So what then is the end of the mystery in verse 7?

It is the end of Rome. It is the judgment of Rome. It is the triumph of the church over Rome. It is the end of Domitian, the terrible man of sin who called himself a god and tried to destroy God's church. All of these events were prophesied, and all of those events happened shortly after this book was written — just as verses 6 and 7 tell us.

And the fulfillment of those prophecies about Rome meant something else as well. Those were the only prophecies left to be fulfilled prior to the return of Christ. Once those events had occurred, Christ could then return at any time. Prior to their fulfillment, Paul would say “that day shall not come **expect**,” but after their fulfillment that day could come at any time.

But what about Constantine? What about the supposed conversion of the entire Roman empire to Christianity? Are we really saying that was **not** part of God’s plan for Rome and the church? **Yes, that is what we are saying.** Those events tell us the history of the Catholic church; they do **not** tell us the history of the Lord’s church. Those events tell us why, to this very day, the Roman Catholic church is modeled after the old Roman empire. The **diocese** for example — that was how the Romans divided their provinces. That concept came from Rome, not from the Bible. A **pontiff** referred first to a priest in the ancient Roman cults. That term came from Rome, not from the Bible. And we could go on and on.

It certainly appears to some that Christianity conquered Rome under the emperor Constantine, and many historians argue that is what happened, but is that really what happened?

To answer this question, it will be helpful first to consider the life and supposed conversion of Constantine the Great. History books portray Constantine as a great champion of Christianity and a friend of the church, but was he?

Constantine was born in about AD 285 and came to power through a complex series of civil wars. At this point, his primary concern was how to unify the empire under his authority. With this aim, Constantine embraced Christianity as a unifying force, staked everything he had on its support, and began to use it for his own purposes.

Was Constantine’s conversion genuine? This question has long been a subject of debate and speculation. Michael Grant has the following to say regarding Constantine’s motivations:

The emperor’s motives have been endlessly analyzed and discussed. But it appears that he and his advisors experienced a growing conviction that, however uninfluential the Christians might be at present, the course of events was working, or could be made to work, in their favor — since they alone possessed the universal aims and efficient, coherent organization that, in the long run, could unite the various conflicting peoples and

classes of the empire in a single, all-embracing harmony which was “Catholic,” that is to say, universal.

A politician exploiting Christians for his own personal power and benefit — where have we ever seen that before?

Constantine not only ended the persecution of Christianity but he began to treat Christianity as though it were a state religion which, in fact, it later became. He authorized state money to be used for the construction of elaborate church buildings.

His own personal lack of conviction is shown by the fact that he had his son, Crispus, put to death, his wife, Fausta, put to death, and he retained his position as the chief priest of the pagan state religion of Rome.

Ramsay Macmullen wrote the following with regard to Constantine’s view of Christianity:

Few of the essential elements of Christian belief interested Constantine very much — neither God’s mercy nor man’s sinfulness, neither damnation nor salvation, neither brotherly love nor, needless to say, humility. Ardent in his convictions, he remained nevertheless oblivious to their moral implications.

As the old saying goes, some peoples’ religion is so private they don’t even impose it on themselves!

Alistair Kee in his excellent book *Constantine Versus Christ* described the situation very well (keeping in mind that he is using the word “church” very broadly):

Because of his relationship to the church, Constantine was able to influence it and Christianity at a profound level. We must now consider how Constantine’s values infiltrated the church: not how he was converted to Christianity, but how through his religious policy he succeeded in converting Christianity to his position.

Kee states later that “the values of Constantine replaced the values of Christ within Christianity” and that “Christianity was enlisted in his own personal crusade to gain control of the Empire and in the process Christianity was transformed.”

The Roman empire's **embrace** of Christianity did more to damage the Church than did the earlier persecutions. Persecution, in a sense, allowed the Church to remain "pure" by effectively excluding anyone not willing to face death for his or her beliefs.

Remember what Paul wrote:

2 Corinthians 12:10 — *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*

Alistair Kee mirrors these thoughts when he states:

Only a sadist would wish that persecution continue in the church, only a masochist welcome it, and yet suffering seemed an inescapable experience for early Christians. ... [T]he history of the church till the fourth century was of random and often intensive persecution. Whenever the Emperor or the traditions of the Empire seemed threatened, it was open season on persecuting Christians. ***And yet this tiny minority, insignificant, weak and defenseless, not only survived but grew.*** ... To Christians ... it was not at all incredible that persecution could actually strengthen the church: it brought precisely the experience in which God was made known to them in strength. ***The later Roman influence effectively weakened the Church from within.***

Under Imperial favor the Church experienced a rapid growth. Many who thronged into it did so from expediency, rather than deep religious conviction, and the moral and spiritual quality of the Christian community suffered.

That is always the effect that society has on the church. When we let the world into the church and start letting the world change us rather than seeking to change the world, we weaken the church from within. That sort of compromise with the world is precisely what was already happening to some of the churches in chapters 2-3.

The "church" of Constantine's day, in embracing Rome, rejected Christ. As a result, the "church" grew to look much more like Rome and much less like the pattern revealed in Scripture.

Dr. Kee's book provides a sobering lesson in the dangers of compromise:

[I]t is therefore all the more tragic that Christians should, in the moment of victory, forsake the Revelation in Jesus, for its opposite in Constantine. The church did not need the protection of Constantine; it had already taken on the Empire, century after century, and had in the end been victorious. ... If Constantine had in turn persecuted the church, he too would have failed to conquer it. How was it then that he was able to succeed where his predecessors had failed? How was it that by a little kindness, a word of praise here, a grant to build a new church there, he was able to induce the church to forsake what they could not be made to forsake under threat of torture or death? The Emperor offered so much, beyond the dreams of Christians recently under constant threat. He offered in effect at least a share in the kingdoms of the world. When Satan is seen to offer such rewards, the temptation is rejected. When one comes professing to be a follower of the One God, then his offer is accepted. ... And once again the Son of Man was betrayed with a kiss. Not that the betrayal took place in a moment. It was a gradual process. Gradually the church came to have faith in the Emperor, to trust him and to see in him and in his ways the hand of God.

So, no, Constantine was not a great champion of the church. He was the opposite. And he provides a valuable lesson today for any in the church who would seek the embrace of the state.

So where are we at the end of verse 7?

Let's not forget what we said about Chapter 10. That chapter is here to provide comfort to the persecuted Christians. Is that what we see here? Absolutely! Talk about a message of comfort! Talk about a message of victory! This mighty angel is swearing 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 was finished with Rome!

And what about the church?

***Daniel 2:44** — And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be*

destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

Matthew 21:44 — *And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*

Hebrews 12:27-29 — *And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.*

The kingdoms of this world are temporary; the church is eternal. The kingdoms of this world will be destroyed; the church is what will destroy them. The kingdoms of this world are made with hands; the church is made without hands. The kingdoms of this world can be shaken; the church cannot be moved. Why? Because our God is a consuming fire! Rome learned that lesson the hard way!