

The Two Witnesses (Part 1)

The Little Book of Revelation 10:8-10

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Many of you have probably noticed that, over the last few years, the ministry of the Church of the Great God has not given very many prophecy sermons. We've given a few at the Feast. I've given two myself—one on The Rest Of God and the other one on Feast Of Tabernacles Basics. But otherwise I think, in the main, they've been pretty few and far between.

I can only speak for myself about why we haven't approached prophecy that much. But for me it's been that, before a couple of years ago, we received too many prophecy sermons; and we got burned out. Or at least, I got burned out. I didn't want any more prophecy sermons. My head was going in a circle most of the time—spinning because it was just too much. I couldn't swallow it all. I couldn't digest it all.

Then, the other reason—the second reason why I haven't given very many prophecy sermons—is that I've become a bit wary about prophecy. Not that I don't believe that it's there for us to learn; but, every time I give a sermon on prophecy, I get so many e-mails and so many other points of view. And I end up wasting a great deal of my time, having to come up with responses. It's far easier for me to stick with doctrine. There's less to argue about.

Now, that's not entirely true. But most people don't tread into doctrine in the same way that they dare to tread into prophecy—because they believe prophecy is for everyone to study into and come up with their own interpretations. Everybody has an opinion! *Many* people have no qualms about giving their opinions. And most of those (who have no qualms about giving their opinions) express their opinions frequently, heatedly, and dogmatically! [Usually] they will not cut a speaker, who has a contrary opinion, any slack.

"This is the way. You'd better preach in it, buddy; because I know what's going to happen." I'm exaggerating a bit, but that's kind of the attitude that comes across. "You are wrong in the way that you have interpreted this prophecy, and I am right. And if you don't take my opinion, then you're no minister at all—if you can't see this." I've gotten quite a few with that tone, and it really bugs me. So I say, "Okay. I don't want to argue." Remember I was the one that gave the sermon on Debate. That all came out of this. I don't like to argue. It makes the hair come up on the back of my neck, gives me a funny feeling, and brings out all the worse parts of my attitude.

So I just decided: "I'm going to try to stay away from this as much as possible." Arguing about prophecy is tiresome, and it is ultimately unproductive. I've rarely gotten anything out of arguing about it. That's simply because we don't know for sure! And so it just ends up with the other person, who's in this argument, saying, "Well, we just have to agree to disagree." So you spend all this time arguing over the matter, and you've actually come up with nothing. It's just been an exercise in vanity!

So I have a new philosophy regarding prophecy. It's not really a "new" philosophy for me. I've

been practicing it for about two years. But I believe God put prophecy in the Bible NOT for us to know beforehand what will occur, but for us to recognize prophetic events *as they occur, or shortly thereafter*. The two terms in here that are very important are "to know" as opposed to "to recognize." How many of us have been 'right' about something that has happened? I don't see very many hands [being raised].

I really think that our dogmatism about the details of the end time scenario blinded us—many of us—to the prophesied scattering. We can go back in the Bible and see "the scattering" in so many patterns in the Bible. But we had this idea that it was going to happen just like this: Mr. Armstrong was going to live right up till the end. Or, he was going to take us to the place of safety. We would all just go in, in wonderful unity. Everything would happen just the way that we said it was going to happen, and everything was going to be nice.

But we didn't see the scattering, because we were so fixed on that one way of looking at things that we were blinded. It was like the horse with the blinders on, going down the street, can't see to the right or left. It has the reins and the blinders all showing it just the front view—and not being able to see peripherally, or to make sense of all that's going on. So, I really feel that being dogmatic about the way that a prophecy is going to turn out is a big negative.

The prophecies are purposely somewhat *vague* so that we will concentrate not on our ideas about how it may happen, but so that we can be aware of what *may* happen. Prophecy is not one of those things where it's all written out and perfectly understood, and this is how it's going to be. God uses symbols. He keeps things a bit vague. The timing sometimes is not understood. How all these different prophecies, in their different sections, done by different prophets—even done in different Testaments—all makes it hard, a puzzle that we have to put together. And we know, because we see through a glass darkly, that all the pieces of the puzzle are not going to exactly fit right—because we don't have the mind of God fully, to understand it.

So we need to take a step back with prophecy and not be so dogmatic, not be so "stuck" (the word I've used before is "hide-bound") to the way that we think prophecy is going to come about. We should be *flexible* enough to be able to see how events in the world are happening and how they fit into the general understanding of prophecy—and not get too stuck on the details.

As we see things—as God continues to reveal certain aspects, or certain details, or whatever—then we can begin understanding it a little bit more fully and deeply, and begin to see "Oh, yes. We were wrong there. We have to add this part in, and make it fit; and then see how it all works out at that point."

The reason I came up with this is because I began to see something. I want you to see this in several scriptures. I want you to see that it's not just one prophet's way of talking about prophecy. In Exodus 6, this is Moses. Actually, this is God speaking; but it's written in the book of Moses—here in Exodus. God says to Moses:

Exodus 6:6-7 Therefore say to the children of Israel: 'I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched

arm and with great judgments. I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. [Now, the next four words...] *Then you shall know* that I am the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.'

Now notice all those things God said He would do: "I will bring you out from the burdens of the Egyptians." "I will rescue you." "I will redeem you." "I will take you as My people." "I will be your God." And then...once all that stuff is done... "*Then you will know...*" *Then you will understand!* And they can *then look back* on what has happened and say, "Ah, I see how He worked that out. I see what He was doing. I see what He was teaching."

Now, let's go to Isaiah 49. I just picked these out at random from all the places where it says, "then, you shall know..." or "then you will know..."

Isaiah 49:22-23 Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I will lift My hand in an oath to the nations, and set up My standard for the peoples. They shall bring your sons in their arms, and your daughter shall be carried on their shoulders. Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. They shall bow down to you with their faces to the earth, and lick up the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD, for they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me."

When does this happen? This is the beginning part of the Millennium! Finally, Israel comes to the conclusion that this is their God. They will probably be getting pretty good hints before this time. But at least in the way that God sets it up right here, they don't really get it—it doesn't really click—until they see this prophecy being fulfilled. Kings of other nations are being the "tutors," let's say, of their children. They are being served by the royalty, the leaders, of these other nations. Why is this so, except that God has made it to be that way? They will begin to see God working, and that's when it all starts to click!

Let's go to Ezekiel 20. This is the "rebellions of Israel" chapter, where He talks about [how] all their idolatries and their Sabbath-breaking is what caused Israel to go into exile and into slavery. This is all the way towards the end—His conclusion. He said:

Ezekiel 20:41 "I will accept you as a sweet aroma when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered..."

Notice the context. This is millennial, again, but this time through Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 20:41-44 ...and I will be hallowed in you before the Gentiles. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for which I raised My hand in an oath to give to your fathers. And there you shall remember your ways and all your

doings with which you were defiled; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight because of all the evils that you have committed. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have dealt with you for My name's sake, not according to your wicked ways nor according to your corrupt doings, O house of Israel," says the Lord God.

It says it twice, in that four verse section. When they get back to the land of Israel and finally begin to repent, *then* they will be able to put things together properly. This is also used in the prophecies of Joel, Zechariah, and Malachi. They all use this same phrase: "Then you shall know." Sometimes it is "then you shall know that I am the Lord." Some times it's "then you shall know that a prophet has been among you," or "then you shall know that the Lord has sent me." But it is always *after the fact!* That is, after a prophecy has occurred. Then we really come to understand what exactly took place.

Now, 'the greatest Prophet of all' also used this. That is, Jesus—in John 8. This is just to put kind of a capstone on this point.

John 8:28 Then Jesus said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things."

He may, indeed, have been talking to His disciples directly—and not to the crowds—when He said this. It was not until after Jesus died, was buried, and was resurrected that His disciples first believed—really *believed!* Later on, in this same book, it says that Peter and John went running pell-mell to the grave where Jesus was. Peter goes in. He looks and sees everything there—except Jesus. John peers in the doorway, and do you know what it says? It says, "And then this disciple believed." John was the first [to believe]. It took seeing the grave clothes folded up neatly in the sepulchre, and no body of Jesus Christ in sight, for him to finally get it. And that act fulfills this prophecy right here. "Then you will know."

What momentous events they had just gone through! And they didn't see it. They didn't see it when He came into Jerusalem and was lauded by all the people, exactly fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah. They didn't see it when He gave the Last Supper, changing the symbols. They didn't see it when one of their own betrayed Him—gave Him a kiss. He even gave the sop directly to Judas after John had asked Him, "Which one of these is it going to be?" He saw it go from Jesus' hand to Judas' hand (or, into Judas' mouth). The prophecy was just a few minutes away from His utterance, and they still didn't believe. They still didn't see how it was all coming together.

And then, of course, there was everything that happened there in the crucifixion; and how many prophecies were fulfilled in the crucifixion, in the burial—I don't know. It must be dozens. And they still didn't believe. The three days went by, and they still didn't believe. John was the first one to believe—when he finally saw that Jesus wasn't in the grave, and he knew that none of the disciples had rolled away that stone and buried the body secretly. Then you will know that I am He, " Jesus said.

They had God-in-the-flesh leading them through all these prophecies, and they still didn't get it—until that point. They finally did get it, but it had all passed by them. It's amazing to think of it. You'd think, "Oh, man. I would have caught that." But, no! (Remember that John was the first to believe. It may just add a little bit to your understanding as we go through this.)

During the Passover service, recorded in John 13, He had just done the footwashing. In verse 18, Christ had just given the prophecy that "He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me." And His next words are:

John 13:19 "Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He."

Like I said, it just happened in the next minute; but they still didn't get it. So, I think in conclusion to this point, it is arrogant and puffed up of *us* to think that *we* have prophecy figured out. We don't have the mind even of the disciples. We don't have the teaching necessarily, from the very mouth of God, as the disciples had; and they couldn't get it. Of course, they weren't converted. That's a big plus on our side. But if they couldn't get it, seeing these things happening right before their very eyes—how are *we* going to be able to get it in our time? I just don't think that we are so much advanced from them, in that way.

So we can know the possibilities, but we cannot be certain. We cannot be truly dogmatic—until the prophecy is fulfilled. We always must approach these things with humility. Because we are clay in the Potter's hand, He gives us what we need to know. And, in many cases, what we need to know isn't "need to know" until *after* it has already happened. God has His own ways, and He is working out His purpose.

Now, if you remember, I developed some of these—at least, the rudiments of this idea—in a sermon called *Why Study Prophecy*, which I gave in July of 1997. And what I said there is that we should study prophecy to see what the Bible presents. This will narrow down the possibilities of how it will be fulfilled. God wants us to know the prophecies—not necessarily the interpretation.

By our knowledge of the Bible and its symbols, we'll be able to know the possibilities. They will get narrowed down rather quickly. But as far as being able to know the interpretation, I think that if we have it in general we are a lot better off than being so molded into one way of looking at it that we might miss it altogether (if it doesn't come out the way we think it will). Once it happens, if we have this knowledge of the prophecies themselves rather than being so stuck on a certain interpretation, we will then recognize the prophecy as it happens. Or, we will have a much better chance of recognizing the prophecy as it happens.

And beyond that, we will be *spiritually prepared* for its consequences. That's the really important part! If we know the prophecies and have an idea of how they will come about (without being stuck so much in one way), then we can prepare ourselves—in our attitudes, in our way of life—so that we can react properly to the prophecy coming to pass. When God puts His hand into world events, and shakes things up, or moves things along, or whatever He does, we'll be able to follow right behind and do the right thing. That's why we need to *know the*

prophecies, but not necessarily their interpretations.

Like I said, we'll have it narrowed down to a certain few areas in which it looks like it will happen. But when it happens, we'll be able to see which one is right and then go with it properly. Of course, this also brings in what Jesus said about watching world events. We need to be watching—keeping our eyes open, seeing what's going on—so that when these things do happen, we will be aware, and awake, and on the move (because of them).

There are a couple of prophecies, at least, that—if we don't know what may happen—we may miss the boat. In terms, let's say, of the prophecy of the armies surrounding Jerusalem—the abomination of desolation. When we see these things come to pass, Jesus says that we have to do something. So, we have to be ready, and willing, and able then to act upon it.

All of this long introduction, and I'm going to go into a subject that runs the risk of prophetic dogmatism. My subject is the Two Witnesses of Revelation 11. What I am going to be doing in these sermons (part one and part two), is that I hope to explain Revelation 10 and 11. We really need to see both of these chapters together. They are really one whole. They are not two separate chapters. One flows right into the other.

Please don't think that this is the last word on the subject. I am going to give you possibilities. I don't want to be dogmatic. But it's just in the way of a preacher to sometimes sound dogmatic. I hope to be able to be corrected properly—in humility, and in mercy I hope—if there is something that I don't have quite right. But we'll try to piece together the biblical clues about this. By the way, the main part about the Two Witnesses won't happen today. That will be for the next sermon. This one will be spent mostly doing the background of what's going on here.

I already mentioned that the context of this prophecy needs to be seen in the light of Revelation 10. There is no break between Revelation 10:11 and Revelation 11:1. I don't know why whoever made these breaks chose to break it right there, because the flow is very obvious—that it goes right into it. Actually, it would have been better had the chapter break gone all the way down to verse 15 [of chapter 11], when the seventh trumpet sounds. That would have been a better chapter break. It would have made for a long chapter 10, but it would have been better. But maybe Satan had a hand in that, because the original Bible didn't have these breaks. Maybe he was able to get some scribe somewhere to do that and mess up the interpretation of these things. I don't know. But we do need to see that this is one whole.

This section of chapters 10 and 11 is what we could call "an inset chapter" or "an inset section." It's a digression from the main flow of the chronology—the main flow of events. And what it does is that it takes some time out to explain an important subject, so that we can get caught up and understand what is going on more fully. There are several of these that go through the book of Revelation. Chapter 12 is one, talking about the church and the persecutions that come upon the church by Satan. There are several others. Probably another one that is well known is chapter 17, about the harlot that rides the Beast, and chapter 18, which is the description of Babylon; and there are a couple others as well. So these all give us important prophetic information that we need to know.

Now, this is very important that we get this one point. The seven thunders, and the eating of the little book in chapter 10, as well as the measuring of the temple and the Two Witnesses in

chapter 11 are all part of one major subject. It's interesting to think about what this major subject is. If you know what the seven thunders are, and if you know what eating the little book means, and you know what measuring the temple means, and you know what the preaching of the Two Witnesses is—then it becomes very clear. If you think about it, what do they all have in common? They all have in common the message and the preaching of that message.

It's very interesting. So what I have worked it down to is that chapters 10 and 11 are an inset chapter on the preaching and work of the church—especially its leadership. The preaching and work of the church—especially, or particularly, its leadership, those messengers that God has called to actually speak His Word.

If you'll recall from my dad's 2000 Feast sermon Revelation 10 and The Church's History, *the seven thunders* are the messages of the seven churches. That runs from Pentecost in A.D. 31 all the way to the beginning of the tribulation. And then, when that time comes, the preaching of the gospel (the preaching of this message) falls to *the Two Witnesses*. They spend the entire tribulation, up until the seventh trumpet, preaching the same message.

But we can't skip over that section there at the end of chapter 10 [Revelation 10: 8-10], about *eating the little book*. It's very, very important to understanding the message—and what it is, and how it works, and what it produces. Actually, it could be that Revelation 10: 8 through 11: 2 should be one section. That is, the eating of the little book and the measuring of the temple. To start, we'll read Revelation 10: 8-10. This is the "little book" section particularly.

Revelation 10: 8-9 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..."

Now, if you listen to that—"Take and eat it."—it sounds very much like what Jesus said to His apostles when He told them to eat the unleavened bread at the Passover service. That's just an aside there.

Revelation 10: 9-10 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.

Let's first understand who the "angel" is here—who's holding this book in His hand, who stands on the sea and on the land. This is Jesus Christ. He is the "angel." If you go back to chapter 10, verse 1, you'll see that the symbolism cannot be anyone else.

Revelation 10: 1 I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. [Now, who went up in a cloud?] And a

rainbow was on his head, his face was like the sun [Whose face is like the sun?], and his feet like pillars of fire. 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. [Who's the lion of the tribe of Judah?] When he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices.

That is, after His uttering, after His ministry. So we see the time element there, that this Lion of Judah (whose face shines like the sun) spoke first and laid everything out. And then the seven thunders took up from where He left off and uttered their message as well—after Him, in succession. So the "angel" from whose hand John took the little book was Jesus Christ Himself.

Now, who in the Bible is the one that gives the words for His ministers? It's Jesus Christ. He is the Word! He is the *Logos*. And the Bible is *His authoritative message* to the church. It is the authoritative message—the Words, the spirit (the words which are spirit and which are life, as it says there in John)—that He gives to His prophets and to His apostles to teach others. So this must be Jesus Christ. All the imagery fits.

So the Head of the church, the original "lion that roared," the original "thunder" (you might want to say), gives to His servant John—who was both an apostle and a prophet. He was the one who wrote this particular book of the Bible—which was full of prophecy. So he must have been both an apostle and a prophet. [Christ gave John] a book—His words—to eat, to ingest.

Now, it was very pleasing to his taste. He likes it. I think that's the way we all approach the Bible. We love to go in there and study the Bible, and find new things, and to really take it in. And it is very good going down, but the consequences of eating it are quite unsettling once we understand what it is telling us to do. It can be even sickening in the way that it turns our world upside down.

In a way, you might even say that this "tasting good" is like our first love—where we are all zealous for it. And then, as we come to understand what it really means and how it affects our life, it becomes less and less and less sweet and more and more bitter. And it makes us do things that are wrenching to our lives. That's where the bitterness comes in. We very often don't want to do the things that it tells us we must do. And so it causes upset. It causes even pain. And sometimes it causes even calamity—when we have to go against, let's say, a family member who is perhaps staunchly Catholic (or staunchly this or that), who does not like what we are doing. It might cause the disruption of a family. It might cause the losing of a job. It might cause persecution. And it can cause death. That's how bitter it can be. And how bitter is death?

Now I think (and this is just my own little heresy) that what this means—when it says his stomach became bitter—is that it's not just queasy. John threw up. He just fell to the ground and threw up all his guts, let's say (to make it as gross as possible). A little later, it says that the angel stood there and said, "*John, get up. Rise.*" Remember that he had gone to take the book, and then he ate it. And as soon as he ate it, he thought it tasted good; but then it made his stomach bitter. And I think he fell down and threw up.

I think that is in here to show us the reaction. God is working here with symbols, and behaviors, and very starkly opposite things. "Umm...Blah." That's the quickness I see. He loved it. It went down, and hit his stomach, and came right back up again. God wants us to see the reaction. Like in Ezekiel, in many cases, God worked with a man's behavior. He wants us to see how *wrenching* taking God's Words into us is to a life. We come out of a world that is totally opposite of His way. And when these two—let's say, "water and oil"—meet, it causes a reaction. Maybe "vinegar and soda" would be better... [Blaaaaaaaaaah.] And up it comes!

So there's a great deal here to show us that things are not easy. That is, putting together *our way of life* before and *God's way of life* as He gives it to us. And then He tells John, "You have to speak about this. You have to talk about this." But the result of this—that he has taken it in—is that now he has the inspiration, the information, and the strength to prophesy, or to preach, again. Even though it caused this great queasiness, this upset (the unsettling, sickening, painful feeling that he got), it still filled him and gave him the strength and the energy that he needed to do the work that he was being given.

We cannot divorce John's prophecies from the prophecies of the Old Testament. What Jesus Christ does in the book of Revelation is to pull together all the pertinent prophecies from the Old Testament into a cogent cohesive whole that gives us all the information we need to know about end-time events. I didn't say that it would give us all the information, but just what we need to know about end-time events.

So what we see in Ezekiel 1:26 and down through Ezekiel 3:27 is *the little book prophecy* of Revelation 10; but here it's called *the scroll prophecy*. What's the difference between a scroll and a book? Not much! Both of them are made into something delectable for the prophet to ingest, and both have the same reaction. But Ezekiel's vision, Ezekiel's prophecy, fills out the details of what happens to John. (This may seem to be a long digression that we are taking here, but it is very important as background to the Two Witnesses.) I just want to pull in part of chapter 1, because this is where Ezekiel sees the mobile throne of God and all the cherubim. In verse 26, we get to God Himself.

Ezekiel 1:26-28 And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it. Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around. [Here we go.] Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.

Now, this correlates directly with Revelation 10:1-2 in the description of the angel, in a cloud, with a rainbow, and the brightness of his face and all the rest. And if you match this with Revelation 1:13-16, you'll see that there are other correlations between this in Ezekiel 1 and the

Son of Man as He is described there in Revelation 1. So this is who we are dealing with here—the very God of all the universe, the One who became Jesus Christ.

Ezekiel 1:28—3:2 So when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of One speaking. And He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you." Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me. And He said to me: "Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. For they are impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse—for they are a rebellious house—yet they will know that a prophet has been among them. And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you dwell among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they are a rebellious house. You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they are rebellious. But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you." Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. Then He spread it before me; and there was writing on the inside and on the outside, and written on it were lamentations and mourning and woe. Moreover He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll.

That's why I did that disgusting noise [earlier] because it sounded like God just pushed it right in, all the way to his tonsils. And he could do nothing else but swallow.

Ezekiel 3:3-15 And He said to me, "Son of man, feed your belly, and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you." So I ate, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness. [Where have we heard that before?] Then He said to me, "Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them. For you are not sent to a people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, but to the house of Israel, not to many people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, had I sent you to them, they would have listened to you. [There's some irony for you.] But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted. Behold, I will make your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads. [You're going to be just as stubborn as they are.] Like

adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house." [How many times has He said that?] Moreover He said to me: "Son of man, receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears. And go, get to the captives, to the children of your people, and speak to them and tell them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' whether they hear, or whether they refuse." Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a great thunderous voice [Isn't that interesting?] "Blessed is the glory of the LORD from His place!" I also heard the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels beside them, and a great thunderous noise. So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me. Then I came to the captives at Tel Abib, who dwelt by the River Chebar; and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days [a whole week].

I want to point out a few things that we just went through here. You saw how many correlations there were between Revelation 10:8-10 and Ezekiel 2 and 3. I just want to run through these as quickly as we can. We already noticed that the same Being gives Ezekiel his commission as He gives John in the vision. It was a rainbow, the cloud, the brightness, the fire, the sun—all those symbols match up quite clearly and succinctly.

Another thing, Ezekiel is sent to Israel and told to preach God's Word. He's supposed to do it, whether they listen or not. The preaching of the apostles was similar. Do you remember when Jesus told His apostles, "Go out and preach the word. If somebody seems good in that place, go ahead and stay in his house; and continue preaching until you wear out your welcome. But if nobody in that town wants to bid you welcome, then shake the dust off your feet and leave that place. So, whether they hear you or whether they don't hear you, preach the word." That is, "say God's words to them."

Now, who did Jesus Christ send His apostles to? The lost sheep of the house of Israel, primarily. Then He told them that they would preach first in Jerusalem, and then in Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth. But the apostles made it a habit to first go to the Israelites. And then when the Israelites rejected them (whether Jews or other Israelites), then they went to the Gentiles and spoke the words—just as they were commanded to do. So the commissions are very similar.

And it's very clear that God thinks and knows that Israel is rebellious and that they would *not* hear. So the Gentiles got the benefit of the preaching, in many cases; and Israel will one day rue that. We read one of those prophecies early on—that they are going to come to pretty much hate themselves for the way that they treated God and His prophets.

Also I should mention here that, in Galatians 6:16, the church is called "the Israel of God." So we have a physical/spiritual parallel here. Not only is Ezekiel (as well as John the apostle) told to go to the house of Israel physically; but here, especially in New Testament times, the church

itself has become God's Israel. The church is the recipient of God's favor and His attention during this time.

Another point: Ezekiel—like John—is told to eat a scroll of a book. In John's time, it was simply "a book." But in Ezekiel's time it was more common to use scrolls (rather than books, like we use them), but the figure is the same. Notice that the contents of the book are more explicitly shown in Ezekiel 2: 10. The writing on it was *lamentations, mourning, and woe*. Not a very happy message!

Basically, the message that was given by the prophets and by the apostles is the same thing that John acted out when he ate "the book." It was bitter in his stomach; and it caused all this pain, an unsettling feeling, and calamity. And, of course, the overall message of the entire book is that things are bad. Things are really bad, and they are going to get worse. They are going to get worse before they can get better. There's a bright hope at the very end of things, but we have to go through a lot of bad things to get there. So the overall tone of this message, then, is rather a downer—*lamentations, mourning, and woe*. (Not fun to be an apostle, or to be a prophet.)

Both of them are specifically told to eat first, and then to speak—meaning that there's a time of preparation where they are taught, where they are instructed, where they are made ready for their jobs; and then they are sent out to the "wolves." That's the way it seems.

Along that same line, God makes Ezekiel equal to the task. Remember that it said He made Ezekiel's forehead just as hard as the Israelite's forehead. So this is another part of the preparation of the servant, or prophet. They are going to have faces as strong as the others, and foreheads as strong as the others. "Harder than flint," He says. That's pretty hard and tough.

You have to be quite a tough man to be one of God's prophets. You can't be any wimpy person. You have to give it with both barrels, and take it as well! I don't know how they did it, but they did. Well, I do know how they did it. God gave them the strength, and the personality, and the character to take it. But you can see from Ezekiel's example that being a servant of God in this way is no walk in the park.

Another point is the contents of the scroll that he is to receive, and where does it go? It says, "Receive it into your heart." That's in Ezekiel 3: 10. Elsewhere there are several scriptures that talk about this. What is written on our hearts is His law, His character, His way of life, and His covenant. Those are basically just four different ways of talking about the same thing. It's *God's revelation to mankind*. That's what is written in our hearts (or, what should be).

You'll probably recognize Jeremiah 31, where the new covenant is given. God says that He would make a new covenant with Israel and write His law on our hearts. That is the message that is written into the heart of the servant of God—the prophet. And what comes out of the heart? "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." So the man's heart must be prepared before he can actually utter a Word of God's.

That's what we see, in symbol, happening to Ezekiel here. He's being prepared for his mission. He's to preach this message, no matter what. And we probably have the best articulation of this in I Corinthians 9: 16, where Paul says: "Woe unto me, if I preach not the gospel." It was such a

part of his heart that he felt certain doom—a curse—if he did not speak what God had written on his heart. And so he was motivated to do that. All the time, anywhere he was, whatever the situation—that's what he lived for.

Now, we didn't read this one; but notice in Ezekiel 1: 24 (where it's talking about God's mobile throne), it says:

Ezekiel 1:24 When they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of many waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a tumult like the noise of an army; and when they stood still, they let down their wings.

What I am talking about here is the "noise," the sound—*the voice of the Almighty!* Then we saw several scriptures where it talked about God's voice being *thunderous*. He heard thunder around him. This connects, then, with Revelation 10—with the seven thunders. These symbols are not here by chance. There are good clues to show that these are parallels, between the Old Testament and New Testament.

This is kind of interesting. The bitterness that he experienced is explained in Ezekiel 3: 14.

Ezekiel 3:14 So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness, [and then there's a kind of parenthetical phrase here, that explains his bitterness. He says...] in the heat of my spirit.

Now, I don't know if your margin has this; but my margin says anger for the word "heat." That is, *the anger of my spirit*. Just hold on to that. It's kind of interesting. What he is talking about here is a kind of zeal—a heat of one's spirit. It's motivating! Something that makes you get up everyday and do something. You have this feeling right inside you that you can't suppress. You have to express it somehow. And the prophet does it through his preaching. But just remember that—"in the heat of my spirit," "in the anger of my spirit." We'll come back to that.

It also involves a bit of astonishment. He was astonished seven days! He couldn't believe what had happened to him. And I think this is a characteristic that the prophets have to have. They have to see the world and say, "What in the world is going on here?" Totally dumbfounded, almost, at the things that are going on. They have to see the total disconnect between *the way it should be* and *the way it is!* That's why they are so dumbfounded. They see things so clearly—from God's perspective—that it just dismays them to see what's going on in the world.

And then when you combine this dismay (this dumbfoundedness, this astonishment) with this heat of their spirit, they have to say something about it. They have to try to go in and correct it somehow. Or, at least, to point it out and say, "Look. Don't you see? This is what God says about this certain thing."

The next section I want to read begins with Ezekiel 3: 16. In the New King James, it says "Ezekiel is a watchman." This was after his period of astonishment. Now he was ready to work.

Ezekiel 3:16-21 Now it came to pass at the end of seven days that the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear the word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: when I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul. Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul."

The rest of it just tells that Ezekiel himself will be a sign, by being struck dumb. The only words that he was able to speak were what God gave him. And that was how they would know that it was God speaking.

What this says is that the servant of God is *a watchman* sent to warn the people. What God dwells on here is *the sins*. He's to warn them of their sins. There is also the element of warning them of what's coming. But this warning message also has a very personal and individual aspect to it. It's not just going and telling the world, "The great tribulation is coming, and Jesus is coming not long thereafter." But there's also the part of "show My people their sins." "Look, you perverts. This is not the way it should be! This is the way God has said. You should change. You should repent." So this is what Ezekiel was supposed to do—with the bitterness, the anger, and the astonishment that had been building up inside him for seven days. And God says, "Okay. This is how you channel that attitude and those emotions. You give a warning message, as a watchman."

Obviously, such a job would bring him into conflict with the people. People don't like to hear such a message. They don't like to hear that things are going down the tubes, and they don't like to hear that they are personally responsible. But that's, basically, *what the watchman's message* is. Nothing changes unless it begins in the individual. The individual must change! He must repent. He must go God's way. And as more individuals do this, society will change. But he's already been told that everything he says is going to fall on deaf ears. So he must have that forehead of flint, that strong face, to keep repeating the message until he dies.

So what we take from all this in Ezekiel 2 and 3 is that the preaching of the seven thunders, and the Two Witnesses, will follow this pattern. How can I say that? The little book—the giving of the little book—is sandwiched (pardon the pun) between the seven thunders and the Two Witnesses. It applies to both. The *seven thunders* preach the same message as the Two

Witnesses—as Ezekiel preached! What we've gone through in Ezekiel 2 and 3 is the pattern for all of God's prophets (or, you could add "apostles" as well).

They all do the same thing. They all preach the same message. God doesn't change! He says that twice in the Book, at least. The same message—all the time, to the same people (Israel), and it's always the same. Preach the words of this revelation—this Book. It's a message of warning. It's a message of repentance. It's a message of growth. And that's just the way it is. It never changes. Why should God change? It's a process that works. It's the way He has set it up. "The foolishness of preaching," Paul calls it. But it sure does witness. That's what it all comes down to. It makes *a witness for God*.

"You are My witnesses, that I am God." That is the bottom line of every message that every prophet has ever given. Every prophet—every apostle—is always pointing back, saying, "These are the words of the LORD. By this way you will come to know Him and to be like Him." And so why are they called the Two Witnesses? Because they are the slam-bang end of all of it, and they give the most significant witness of God maybe of all time.

Revelation 11:3 "And I will give power to My two witnesses..."

Do you know what that actually says? "I will give to these witnesses of Me." Isn't that interesting? He doesn't say He just possesses them. That is, that they are His witnesses. He says that they witness "of Me." They are pointing everybody in the world to Jesus Christ and thus on to God the Father. That's their job! (To witness of Him.)

We've said for ages that the whole Old Testament points to Jesus Christ, and the whole New Testament tells His story. So the whole Bible is also a witness of Jesus Christ and therefore onto God the Father. Everything comes down to witnessing of Jesus Christ. What are we called? "Christians." Our whole lives are totally focused (should be focused) on showing Jesus Christ to us. And these Two Witnesses are the pinnacles of that, among men. They'll do it for 3½ years, in the face of the entire world.

It's very interesting, when we get into this next time, how these Two Witnesses correlate with Jesus Christ Himself. They are going to be personal "images" of Jesus Christ (if you take that in the proper way). We are all supposed to come into the image of Jesus Christ, and these Two Witnesses—these two prophets—really show it to the world. It's like they are two "Christs" walking the earth. Maybe I'm exaggerating that a bit, but that's one of the ways in which *you* witness; and that's why these two are so important.

We'll save Revelation 11 for the next time. You'll notice how dogmatic I was. Sorry about that. When you get into it, you understand that the Bible interprets itself; and it's very important that the right emphasis be placed on it.