

LITTLE SCROLL OF REVELATION 10

“Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land.” And I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, “Take it, and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.” And I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and it was in my mouth sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. And they said to me, “You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings” (Revelation 10:8b–11).

Inverted Parallelism in the Book of Revelation: John Reads and Digests a Little Scroll and then Prophesies Again to Many Peoples, Nations, Tongues, and Kings (10:1–11) || 144,000 and Three Angels Prophecy to Every Nation and Tribe and Tongue and People (14:1–13). That is to say, the prophetic ministry of the Apostle John in the first century (ch. 10) is parallel to the prophetic ministries of the 144,000 and the three angels during the Tribulation (14:1–13).

Importance of the Little Scroll: At first read chapter 10 doesn’t seem very important. It makes little sense, so most just read on to the next chapter. John doesn’t say what the little scroll is, what’s written on it, why it’s important, or what it’s for. But, if it’s not important, why does the apostle devote a whole chapter to it? So we must assume it’s important! Now, to discover its importance we must examine chapter 10’s content, context, and repeated allusions to the Book of Ezekiel. And as we will see, the little scroll contains prophecies of the judgments to come from the middle of the Tribulation to the Last Judgment. The little scroll also shows that Revelation, like Ezekiel, is mostly chronological; that is, the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments are sequential, not parallel.

Content and Purpose of the Little Scroll: It should be noted that the content and purpose of the little scroll is not mentioned in chapter 10—nor elsewhere in the Apocalypse. We can, however, deduce it’s content and purpose from the verses of chapter 10 and from its context, placement, or position in the Book of Revelation. To begin, the little scroll is *written* revelation (probably in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek) and may have been written exclusively for John. Or perhaps future events on earth were foreknown, decreed, and written down beforehand in a series of scrolls stored in a heavenly library—in which case the little scroll is intended for a wider audience. And like the seven-sealed scroll in chapter 5, someone in heaven wrote it—perhaps an angel. Apparently this little scroll *previews* in writing the next series of visions to be revealed to John. This preview, once eaten (metonymy for reading, meditating on, and mentally digesting some kind of knowledge or divine revelation), will help him interpret what he sees in the coming visions. It takes the place of an interpreting angel (as in 7:13–17). In other words he must assimilate these written prophecies first before he is shown more visions. So chapters 11–20 in the Apocalypse are a composite of what John read in the little scroll *and* the even more detailed visions he received. I believe a clue to the scroll’s content is revealed in verse 11. After eating (mentally assimilating) the little scroll (“and when I had eaten it” 10:10), John is told to “prophesy again” (10:11); that is, to resume prophesying after reading and understanding the scroll. So it’s likely that the content of the little scroll includes at minimum the three visions that precede the next interlude (ch. 14): **(1)** the Dragon: “woe to the earth (*ge*) and the sea (*thalassa*), because the devil has come down to you” (12:12); **(2)** the Antichrist: “a beast coming up out of the sea (*thalassa*)” (13:1–10), and **(3)** the False Prophet: “another beast coming up out of the earth (*ge*)” (13:11–18). To these I believe we may add **(4)** the Vintage: reaping “the vine of the earth (*ge*)” (14:19); **(5)** the Bowl Judgments: “pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God on the earth (*ge*)” (16:1; cf. the first bowl “poured out on the earth [*ge*]” in 16:2 and the second bowl “poured out on the sea [*thalassa*]” in 16:3); **(6)** Babylon: “judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth (*ge*)” (19:2) and “as many as make their living by the sea (*thalassa*) . . . were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea (*thalassa*) became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!’” (18:11–19); **(7)** Armageddon: “kings of the earth (*ge*) and their armies . . . were killed with the sword . . . from the mouth of Him” (19:19–21); **(8)** the Final Revolt: “deceive the nations . . . of the earth (*ge*)” “number of them is like the sand of the sea (*thalassa*)” (20:8 RCL), and “came up on the broad plain of the earth (*ge*) . . . and fire . . . devoured them” (20:9), and **(9)** the Final Judgment: “from whose presence earth (*ge*) and heaven fled away” (20:11) and “the sea (*thalassa*) gave up the dead which were in it . . . judged . . . thrown into the lake of fire” (20:13–14). The tie that binds the little scroll to all these visions is the threefold repetition of “sea (*thalassa*)” and “land (*ge*)” in chapter 10 (verses 2, 5, 8). Evidently the strong angel read the open scroll beforehand and knows its content, so, with vivid symbolism that anticipates the coming judgments on sea and land, he plants one fiery foot in the sea (causing it to boil, hiss, and steam) and one on the land (scorching the earth).

Multiple Allusions to the Scroll of Ezekiel: I believe the content and purpose of the little scroll may also be found in the *obvious* allusions to the scroll in Ezekiel 2:8–3:3. So let’s take a look at the parallels between these two scrolls. *Obvious allusions in Revelation 10 to Ezekiel 2–3:* **1.** “he had in his hand a little book” (Rev 10:2) || “a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll was in it” (Ezk 2:9); **2.** “which was open” (10:2) and “open in the hand of the angel” (10:8) || “He spread it out before me” (2:10); **3.** “eat it” (10:9) and “I took the little book . . . and ate it” (10:10) || “eat this scroll” (3:1) and “I ate it” (3:3); **4.** “it was in my mouth sweet as honey” (10:10) || “it was sweet as honey in my mouth” (3:3); **5.** “And they said to me, ‘You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings’” (10:11) || “Then He said to me, ‘Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them’” (3:4). *Not so obvious allusions in Revelation 10 to Ezekiel 2–3:* **1.** preceded by the sixth trumpet judgment || preceded by the fourth cycle of discipline for Judah; **2.** no repentance after a third of the earth is killed || no repentance after 10,000 captives are exiled to Babylon in 597 BC; **3.** failure to repent in the midst of judgments—with the bowls yet to come || failure to repent in the midst of judgments—with the fifth cycle of discipline yet to come (cf. Lev 26:14–39); **4.** warning of even worse judgments (seven bowl judgments) || warning of even worse judgments (fifth cycle is seven times worse); **5.** implied from their refusal to repent “the rest of mankind . . . did not repent . . . they did not repent” (Rev 9:20–21) || “rebellious people” (Ezk 2:3), “stiff of face and hard of heart” (2:4), “rebellious house” (2:5, 6, 8; 3:9), “rebellious” (2:7, 8), “strong of forehead and hard of heart” (3:7), strong faces and strong foreheads (3:8); **6.** implied purpose of “You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings” (10:11) || Ezekiel is told to warn the wicked to turn from his wickedness and the righteous not to turn away from his righteousness (3:16–21); **7.** John’s third commission (chapter 10) || Ezekiel’s first and second commission (2:3–3:11); **8.** the people of the tribulation do not listen to John || the people will not listen to Ezekiel (3:7; cf. 2:5, 7; 3:11). *Note:* a commission is “the act of granting certain powers or the authority to carry out a particular task or duty” (*Free Online Dictionary*). John’s first commission (1:10–11) is to prophesy to the seven churches (chs. 2–3); second commission (4:1) about the first half of the Tribulation (chs. 4–9); third commission (10:11) about the middle and last half of the Tribulation, final revolt, fate of Satan, and Great White Throne Judgment (chs. 11–20); and fourth commission (21:5) about the Eternal Kingdom (chs. 21–22).

The Scroll Is at the Center of the Inverted Parallelism of Ezekiel 1:1–3:15: **A** Ezekiel Sees Visions by the River Chebar (1:1–3); **B** Vision of God’s Chariot Throne Approaching Ezekiel (1:4–2:1); **C** Spirit Enters and Sets Ezekiel on His Feet (2:2); **D** First Commission to Prophesy to the Rebellious Exiles of Judah and a Promise of Divine Empowerment (2:3–8a); **E** Scroll with Prophecies of Lamentation, Mourning, and Woe (2:8b–3:3); **D’** Second Commission to Prophesy to the Rebellious Exiles of Judah and a Promise of Divine Empowerment (3:4–11); **C’** Spirit Lifts Ezekiel Up (3:12a); **B’** Vision of God’s Chariot Throne Leaving Ezekiel (3:12b–13); **A’** Spirit Takes Ezekiel Away to the River Chebar (3:14–15; cf. 8:3; 11:1, 24; 43:5).

Content and Purpose of Ezekiel’s Scroll: The *general* content of Ezekiel’s scroll is clearly stated: “and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe” (2:10b). No blessings, just future judgment for the exiles in Babylon, the Jews in Jerusalem and Judah, and their Gentile neighbors. The allusions to this scroll in Revelation 10 suggest that the content of the little scroll is also lamentations, mourning, and woe. The *specific* content of Ezekiel’s scroll is revealed in the judgments of chapters 4–32: prophecies of the fall of Jerusalem (chs. 1–24) and prophecies of judgment on nearby Gentile nations (chs. 25–32). It does not, however, include the prophecies of the restoration and blessings of Israel at the end of the Book (chs. 33–48). In the same way the *general* content of the little scroll is revealed in the *specific* judgments of chapters 11–20: the defeat of Satan (“woe to the earth and the sea” ch. 12), the rise of the Antichrist and False Prophet (ch. 13; “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or upon his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God” 14:9–11), the seven bowl judgments (“third woe” of 11:14 is the bowls of ch. 16), the judgment on Babylon (“woe, woe, the great city, Babylon” 17:1–19:4), the second coming of Christ (“great wine press of the wrath of God” 14:17–20; 19:5–20:3), and the Final Judgment (“he was thrown into the lake of fire” 20:15). The little scroll, likewise, does not include the blessings of the new heavens and new earth (21:1–22:5).

Rebellious Attitudes in Ezekiel’s Day and after the Sixth Trumpet Judgment: Similar rebellious attitudes are the reason for the allusions to the scroll of Ezekiel. The survivors of the sixth trumpet judgment (the second woe) are rebellious, stubborn, and refuse to listen after a terrible judgment that reduces the earth’s population by one-third (9:20–21). So God recreates similar symbolism (eat the little scroll) and instructions (go out and prophesy again) for John because the people of the Tribulation will have the same unrepentant attitude as the exiles of Ezekiel’s day. God chooses to deal with the survivors of the second woe in the same way he dealt with the rebellious “house of Israel” many years earlier; that is, to give another scroll to another prophet to eat, digest, and assimilate—and then prophesy lamentations, mourning, and woe to encourage them to repent.