

“A MESSAGE THAT IS BOTH BITTER AND SWEET”

I. Introduction

- A. In our study of the vision of the seven seals, we saw that there was an interlude or parenthesis in between the sixth and the seventh seals.
- B. The purpose of that interlude was to emphasize the Lord’s spiritual protection over his people amid the judgments that he sends upon the earth.
- C. In Revelation 10 and 11, we come to the interlude that stands in between the sixth and seventh trumpets.
- D. The focus of these chapters is upon the task that the church has been given as we live alongside unbelievers in this world upon which God’s judgment is already falling.
- E. As we study chapter 10 today, we will consider what it tells us about the message that we have been given to proclaim.

II. The Mighty Angel (1-3)

- A. Our text begins with John describing his vision of another mighty angel coming down from heaven.
 - 1. The way that John describes the angel raises questions about the identity of this being.
 - 2. While the “mighty angel” whom John described in chapter 5 was clearly an angelic being, the mighty angel in this chapter is described in terms that are used elsewhere in Revelation in connection with God himself.
 - 3. The angel is “wrapped in a cloud,” and Jesus was described in chapter 1 as the one who “is coming with the clouds.”

4. The angel has a “rainbow over his head,” and in chapter 4 God’s throne was surrounded by a rainbow.
 5. The angel’s face is “like the sun,” and in chapter 1 Jesus’ “face was like the sun shining in full strength.”
 6. Moreover, the angel speaks with a voice “like a lion roaring,” and in chapter 5 Jesus was called “the lion of the tribe of Judah.”
 7. These things lead some interpreters to conclude that this mighty angel is none other than Jesus himself.
 8. This certainly seems possible, especially when we remember that the term “angel” does not always refer to an angelic being.
 9. The basic meaning of the term is ‘messenger.’
 10. It is true that all of the other uses of the term “angel” in Revelation refer to angelic beings.
 11. Nevertheless, the similarities between the description of this mighty angel and the descriptions of Christ elsewhere in the book of Revelation are significant.
 12. If this mighty angel is not Jesus himself, he is clearly representative of Jesus.
- B. The symbolism connected with the angel helps us understand what is being conveyed to John in this vision.
1. The rainbow points back to God’s covenant with Noah, when he gave the rainbow as the sign to assure the world that he will not destroy it again until the end of the age.
 2. The rainbow is thus the sign of the restraint of divine judgment, the sign that declares that God will sustain the world until the time that he has appointed for the consummation of his plan of judgment and salvation.

3. It is fitting that John would see a rainbow in this vision that he receives in between the sixth and seventh trumpets.
 4. God is telling John about his purposes for the church during this present age, the period when divine judgment is being held back.
 5. The rainbow is the symbol of divine forbearance, the sign of judgment being suspended, even though judgment is deserved and even though it is certain.
 6. By the way, we should note the irony in the fact that the LGBT movement has chosen the rainbow as its symbol.
 7. The irony is found in the fact that the only reason why these people can promote their wicked agenda is because God's judgment is being restrained.
- C. The fact that the mighty angel that John sees is "wrapped in a cloud" and has "legs like pillars of fire" is also of special significance.
1. This points to the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire in the book of Exodus.
 2. God appeared to his people in those pillars to assure them that he was with them and to provide them with guidance while they journeyed through the wilderness.
 3. In the same way, this vision declares that the Lord is with his people as our protector and guide amid the trials that we face as we walk through the wilderness of this world.

4. As we sing,

*Round each habitation hov'ring,
See the cloud and fire appear
For a glory and a cov'ring,
Showing that the Lord is near:
Thus deriving from their banner
Light by night and shade by day,*

*Safe they feed upon the manna
Which he gives them when they pray.*

- D. John also says that the angel set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land.
1. This presents a picture of a great colossus, a figure so large that he can stand astride the entire earth.
 2. This image declares God's complete sovereignty over all things, and especially over the forces of evil in the world.
 3. In chapter 13 John will describe two demonically-inspired beasts who rise up out of the sea and from the earth.
 4. Here we are assured that the Lord is sovereign over those forces of evil.
 5. This is further underscored by the fact that this mighty angel calls out with a loud voice, a voice that is like that of a lion, the king of all the beasts.
 6. Though there is great evil afoot in this world, it is always under the sovereign control of our God, and he has appointed a day when all workers of evil will receive the judgment they deserve.

III. The Seven Thunders (4-7)

- A. This brings us to the seven thunders that sound when the mighty angel calls out with his loud voice.
1. This points to the power and authority of God's decrees.
 2. It brings to mind these verses from Psalm 29, where it says, "The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over many waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox.

The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire. The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth and strips the forests bare, and in his temple all cry, 'Glory!'"

3. It is interesting that the phrase "the voice of the LORD" occurs seven times in that psalm.
 4. This underscores the perfection and completeness of God's power, as do the seven thunders in our text in Revelation.
- B. John tells us that when he was about the write down what was revealed to him in these seven thunders, he was commanded by a voice from heaven to seal it up and not to write it down.
1. This is an echo of Daniel 12, where the prophet is told, "shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end." (Dan 12:4 ESV)
 2. The reason why Daniel was given that command was because the time of fulfillment was yet to come.
 3. In our text, the seven thunders appear to be another cycle of judgments that are of the same order as the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls.
 4. For some reason, God chose not to have John write about the seven thunders.
 5. Interpreters have suggested a variety of theories about what this means.
 6. Perhaps the best is simply that this reminds us that God has not told us everything.
 7. Even though the book of Revelation pulls back the veil so that we can see the world from a heavenly perspective, there are still many things that we do not know.

8. There are principles at work in the world that we cannot understand.
- C. This relates to verses 6-7, where the angel swears that there will be no more delay, and that at the sounding of the seventh trumpet the mystery of God will be fulfilled.
1. “Mystery” is another term that points us back to the book of Daniel.
 2. Daniel uses this term repeatedly when he is asked to interpret the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream.
 3. That dream had to do with the rise and fall of great earthly kingdoms, and with the ultimate victory of God’s kingdom over them all.
 4. The term “mystery” is typically used in Scripture to describe something that was formerly hidden that is now being revealed.
 5. The prime example of this comes at the very end of Romans, where Paul writes, “Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.” (Rom. 16:25–27)
 6. In our passage, the angel is using the word “mystery” in reference to God’s plan for history, a plan that he had made known to the prophets of old.
 7. Now, with the sounding of the last trumpet, that plan will come to completion.
 8. This will mark the final answer to the cry of the martyrs back in chapter 6, when they said, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who

dwell on the earth?"

9. In chapter 6, God answered that plea by telling the saints to rest a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete.
10. That verse tells us that the delay of judgment is for the sake of the gathering of all the elect.
11. Here in chapter 10 we are told that when the gathering is complete, the seventh trumpet will sound and there will be no further delay.

IV. The Little Scroll (8-11)

- A. The last part of Revelation 10 focuses on the little scroll that the angel has in his hand.
 1. We should note that the previous mention in Revelation of a strong angel crying out with a loud voice was also connected with a scroll.
 2. Back in chapter 5, John saw a scroll in the hand of the one seated on the divine throne, and he heard a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"
 3. A few verses later, we are told that Jesus, the Lamb of God, has conquered and is therefore able to open the scroll.
 4. That scroll contained God's comprehensive plan of judgment and salvation.
 5. The reason why Jesus alone can open that scroll is because it is only through his mediatory work that that plan can be put it into effect.
 6. The little scroll here in chapter 10 seems to be connected to that previous scroll in the sense that it is a shortened version of it.
 7. The significance of all of this is that while there are many things about God's comprehensive plan that are not made known to us,

there are also things about it that he has revealed to us.

8. As it says in Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."
 9. The little book is symbolizing the things that are revealed to us.
 10. These are the things about God's plan that we are meant to know.
 11. The little scroll represents the things that are made known in the book of Revelation, and by extension the things that are revealed in the Bible as a whole.
- B. John is told to take the scroll from the angel's hand and to eat it.
1. The Old Testament background to this is found in Ezekiel 2 and 3.
 2. In that passage, Ezekiel has a vision in which he is commanded to eat a scroll that was filled with words of lamentation and woe.
 3. And when he eats the scroll, he finds that it is as sweet as honey in his mouth.
 4. Even though the message was one of judgment, it was sweet to the prophet because it was the expression of God's holy will and the revelation of his being.
 5. We see something very similar in our text, where John says that the scroll was sweet as honey in his mouth but that it made his stomach bitter.
- C. There are several important lessons for us in this.
1. First, the fact that John is instructed to eat the little scroll reminds us of our need to take God's Word into the deepest recesses of our being.

2. As it says in one of the prayers in the Anglican Church's Book of Common Prayer, we are to "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" God's Word.
 3. We need to internalize the Word and live in submission to it.
 4. This is how the Word functions as God's instrument to transform us by the renewing of our minds.
- D. It is also important to note that the scroll is sweet in John's mouth yet bitter in his stomach.
1. The sweetness points us to the fact that the Word of God is precious to believers.
 2. We value it more than silver or gold because it is the revelation of God's will and because it contains the message of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.
 3. At the same time, the Bible's message is not a message that is warmly received by the world, or by a worldly church.
 4. It is not a message that people want to hear because it exposes their sin and calls them to repentance.
 5. Nevertheless, John is commanded to make this message known to the peoples of the world.
 6. As he writes in verse 11, "I was told, 'You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.'"
 7. The term "prophesy" does not merely refer to predicting future events.
 8. It also includes giving a revealed interpretation of the present.
 9. The command to prophesy is still in effect for the church today — not in the sense of giving new revelation but in the sense of

proclaiming the revelation that has already been given.

10. The world has its own framework for understanding reality, and its framework is always twisted and distorted by sin.
11. We have been given the task of setting forth the divinely revealed framework for understanding reality.
12. And even though our open statement of the truth is sometimes met with hostility and scorn, we are still called to proclaim it.

V. Conclusion

- A. John's ingestion of the little scroll, paired with the command to prophesy, prepares the way for the second half of the interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets, which is set forth in chapter 11.
- B. In that chapter, we see the church represented as two lampstands that give testimony to the peoples of the earth.
- C. Once those lampstands have given their testimony, they are killed by the beast that rises out of the bottomless pit.
- D. We will have more to say about all of that next week.
- E. For now, the important thing to bear in mind is that we should not be surprised when our witness to God's truth is met with the world's hatred.
- F. But neither should we be discouraged.
- G. After all, we serve the One who stands astride the entire universe.