

The Bittersweet Book: A Mighty Angel and His Little Book

Revelation 10:1-11

Introduction: 1) In 2 Corinthians 2:14-17 the Apostle Paul speaks of the Christian ministry of the gospel as a ministry of life and a ministry of death. He writes in verses 15-16, “But thanks be to God, who always puts us on display in Christ and through us spreads the aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For to God we are the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To some we are an aroma of death leading to death, but to others, an aroma of life leading to life.” The ministry of the word is a ministry of life and death, or as the Apostle John records in Revelation 10:9-10, it is bitter and sweet. It is a bittersweet message he is commanded to proclaim again among the nations (v. 11).

2) Revelation 10:1-11:14 is an interlude or parenthesis between the 6th and 7th trumpets. We saw an earlier interlude in 7:1-17 between the 6th and 7th seals. Interestingly, there is no parallel interlude between the sixth and seventh bowl judgments in chapter 16 (Duvall, 142). The reason is clear: when the bowl judgments are poured out “it is done!” (16:17).

3) Chapter 10 revolves around a mighty angel, a little scroll, and a recommissioning for John to “prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings” (v. 11). The idea of prophecy, proclamation of the word

given by God, concludes the argument of this passage. There is certainly a change of subject matter from chapters 8-9. There we witnessed the outpouring of God's wrath on unbelieving humanity, what Revelation repeatedly calls "those who live [ESV, "dwell"] on the earth" (8:13), those who lack the seal of God's protection on their foreheads (9:4). Now we see a word of encouragement for believers. "God's hidden plan will be completed" (v. 8). You can trust Him to finish things in His time and in His way. You can be confident in His purposes, so keep on proclaiming the gospel among "many peoples, nations, languages, and kings" (v. 11). There will be a price to pay (11:1-10), but God will honor and vindicate His people (11:11-19). You can count on it. Chapter 10 begins with a word from heaven. It is both instructive and timely.

I. God's word comes with authority 10:1-4

Devastating and horrific judgment is interrupted for a moment. The interruption provides "additional information bearing on the previous events and to prepare the reader for further developments" (Johnson, BSC, 102). The interruption, or interlude, comes in a glorious and powerful manner as God addresses his servant. Indeed, God speaks with majestic and awesome authority. The overused word "awesome" is appropriate on this occasion.

1) It is authoritative and comprehensive 10:1-3

- John says, “Then I saw,” an important and reoccurring phrase in Revelation (4:1; 7:1, 9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1, 11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11; 21:1). What did he see? He saw “another mighty angel.” Angels are mentioned more than 60 times in Revelation, mighty or strong angels 3 times (5:2; 10:1; 18:21). The angel, coming down from heaven, is described as “mighty” perhaps because he is both majestic (v. 1) and mammoth (v. 2, 5, 8). Demons ascend out of the abyss in chapter 9, but this angel as God’s servant, descends from above. He comes to earth with great authority as God’s ambassador.
- The description of the angel recalls the vision of the exalted Christ 1:12-16. However, this is not Christ but His heavenly representative. Some think it could possibly be “Michael, the great prince...” (Johnson, EBC, 677). Regardless, the 4-fold description is the most detailed and majestic of any angel in Scripture (Osborne, 393). “Surrounded (ESV, “wrapped”) by a cloud” symbolizes glory, majesty and power. It recalls the coming of the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13-14. God led Israel by a cloud (Exodus 16:10). Dark clouds covered Sinai when the law was given (Exodus 19:9). God appeared to Moses in a cloud of glory (Exodus 24:15; 34:5). Indeed the Bible says in Psalm 104:3, “[He] makes the clouds His chariot, who walks on the wings of the wind.”

Interestingly 9 of the 20 occurrences of clouds in the New Testament are connected with judgment (Matthew 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27; Revelation 1:7; 14:14, 15, 16). [David Levy, “Angel with a Little Scroll,” *Israel My Glory*, June/July 1996, p. 21].

“A rainbow over His head” is a sign of God’s covenant faithfulness. It echoes the story of Noah and the flood. It adorned His head like a crown (Genesis 9:12-16; Ezk. 1:26-28; Rev. 4:3). MacArthur notes, “While the cloud symbolizes judgment, the rainbow represents God’s covenant mercy in the midst of judgment (as it did in 4:3). [vol. 1, 280].

“His face was like the sun,” brilliant, radiant, for he had been in the presence of God and as a result, is an awesome reflection of the Lord.

“His legs were like fiery pillars,” a picture of stability and uncompromising holiness. And, with a possible background in the Exodus wanderings, ideas of guidance, protection and deliverance are lurking about (Osborne, 394).

In verse 2 we are told the angel “had a little book” (mentioned 4 times in chapter 10). This, I believe, is a different book than the sealed book of chapter 5 (Mounce, 202). So massive is this angel that he lays claim for his message on all the earth, setting his right foot on the sea and his left on the land (mentioned 3 times). Furthermore, his message is to warn all

and be heard by all. He “cried out with a loud voice, like a roaring lion” (v. 3). The whole world is under his feet. The whole world is in the hands of God. Hosea 11:10 says, “the Lord...will roar like a lion; indeed He will roar.” Joel 3:16 says, “The Lord roars from Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and earth tremble.”

His cry is accompanied by 7 thunders which spoke or cry. In the little book is the Word of God. In the 7 thunders there is additional judgment from God, a judgment that comprehensively will impact the whole world.

2) It is sovereign and mysterious 10:4

- Seven seals have afflicted the earth. Six of seven trumpets have blown in cataclysmic judgment. Seven thunders are now ready to vent their judgment as well. They have already sounded. They are ready to act. John is ready to write. Then something amazing occurs. John hears a voice from heaven. I believe it is the voice of our God. John is told, “Seal up what the seven thunders said, and do not write it down.”
- These are the only words in the Revelation that are sealed up. Revelation 22:10 says, “Don’t seal the prophetic words of this book, because the time is near.” But here, this one time, John is commanded (“seal up” is an imp.) not to write what the “thunders said.” Why? We cannot be certain. We can only make educated guesses. We should note God did

something similar to the prophet Daniel (8:26; 12:4, 9). And Deuteronomy 29:29 tells us the secret things belong to the Lord, so it may be best to simply admit that we don't know. But, there is a second consideration to contemplate. The 7 thunders no doubt would be another horrible series of judgment unleashed upon planet earth. But, God says no. They will not move ahead. He speaks and they are stilled. Is God silencing them as an act of grace and mercy? Is it an evidence of God's longsuffering and patience? Yes, there will "be no more delay" (v. 7, *ESV*). However, as bad as the seal, trumpets and bowls are, it could have been worse.

- Exactly why John was not allowed to write further about the thunders remains a mystery, at least for now. Maybe someday we will know. Then again, maybe not. Osborne wisely notes, "John is being told to affirm God's sovereign control over the judgments proclaimed in the thunders and then is prohibited from revealing the contents to his readers. The major message is one of sovereignty. God is in control, and the saints do not need to know all the details" (398). Osborne is right. So in the meantime, we will trust in the plans of our sovereign God and marvel at His mysterious ways. After all, He is God and we are not, a lesson we mere mortals too often struggle to remember.

II. God's word is certain

10:5-7

In Isaiah 55:11 our God promises us, “So my word that comes from My mouth will not return to Me empty, but it will accomplish what I please and will prosper in that I send it to do.” When our Lord speaks, His word is certain, sure and trustworthy. It will come to pass. You and I can count on it. In a powerful and sovereign declaration, the mighty angel swears that which God “announced to His servants the prophets” (v. 7) “would be fulfilled” (*ESV*). Indeed, “there would be no more delay” (v. 6). I believe the drama of Daniel 12 finds its fulfillment in these verses.

1) Trust God to confirm His word

10:5-6

In an act of solemn oath taking the angel of v. 1 raises his right hand to heaven. This is the only time an oath is taken in Revelation. In Matthew 5:34-35 Jesus spoke against frivolous and deceitful swearing. His brother James taught the same lesson (James 5:12). However, throughout Scripture godly men and women such as Abraham (Genesis 21:25-31), Isaac (Genesis 26:26-31), David (1 Samuel 20:12-17), Paul (Acts 18:18), Jesus (Matthew 26:63-64) and God Himself (Hebrews 6:13) took oaths as a witness of confirmation to speak the truth (MacArthur, 284). This angel swears an oath and he takes it in the name of the living God “who lives forever and ever” (v. 6). This acknowledges His eternity (cf. 1:18; 4:9, 10; 15:7).

Furthermore, He is the God who created heaven, earth, and sea and “what is in it” (repeated 3 times for emphasis). He is the sovereign Creator. He alone is the uncaused cause, Aristotle’s “Unmoved Mover,” the source and ultimate cause of all that is. This angel could not have sworn by any greater. God will confirm His Word.

2) Trust God to complete His work 10:6-7

The message of God’s servant angel is 2 fold: First, “there would be no delay” (*ESV*). This answers the question of the martyrs in 6:10. God will not stop or delay the remaining judgments. Evil will now run its course quickly as Antichrist rises from the Abyss (11:7) and emerges as a world ruler (2 Thessalonians 2:3ff; Revelation 13:1-18). God and evil, the Dragon and the Lamb, are headed for a cosmic conflict, a global showdown. It will happen soon.

Second, when the 7th angel sounds to send forth the 7 bowls (chapter 16), the mystery of God will be fulfilled, complete, finished as He declared (announced, proclaimed) to His servants (*doulous*) the prophets. A mystery is a truth previously concealed but now revealed. God’s purpose in creation and redemption, made possible through the blood of the Lamb, is now revealed plain. It is nothing less than the answer to the prayers of the saints throughout history, “Thy kingdom come...on earth as it is in heaven”

(Matthew 6:10). The time is now. The kingdom will come. God has willed from eternity past the complete and final defeat of evil. That day is coming. You can trust God to complete His work. We may fail Him, but He will never fail us! His word is certain. “God has instigated the final events of world history, and nothing can delay them” (Mounce, 399).

III. God’s word must be assimilated 10:8-11

These verses are the most applicable and practical in this passage of Scripture. They have a clear relevance for every generation of believers and followers of the Lamb. The imagery is striking, and the meaning self-evident. The “little scroll” of v. 2 reappears and takes center stage. Note it is mentioned 3 times in vs. 8-10. God’s word comes with authority. Its promises and prophecies are certain to be fulfilled. However, it is of little or no value to us personally if we do not take it, read it, feed on it and then proclaim it. It is a bittersweet book to be sure. It is a book that will change us. It is a book that leaves no one the same. Life and death are in its words. How then do we respond to this word?

1) Take the Word 10:8

The voice from heaven speaks again (v. 4). The voice is almost certainly the voice of God. This voice commands authority and demands obedience. John is told to “go” and “take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel.”

Both “go” and “take” are imperatives of command. No doubt John needed

such a word to approach such a mighty angel (v. 1). Interestingly the scroll lies open. For you and me, we also have an open book God has prepared for us to read. It is called the Bible. As John is commanded to go and take this little scroll for his spiritual edification, God commands us to go and take His big book and explore its truths. For us there is no intimidating angel to approach. There is an open book ready for the taking. All you have to do is go and get it.

2) Feed on the Word 10:9-10

John approaches the angel and requests the scroll. The angel responds by telling him to “take it” and to “eat it.” Both verbs are imperatives. John is to take the scroll and devour it, to completely eat it up. The Old Testament background is plainly Jeremiah 15:16 and Ezekiel 2:9-3:3. What a powerful image for how we should approach the Word of God. This book is honey (Ps. 19:10; 119:103; Prov. 24:13), better than bread (Matt. 4:4), meat (1 Cor. 3:1-2) and milk (1 Peter 2:2). Here is a diet for spiritual health and nourishment. However, we can expect a 2-fold reaction when eating and digesting this book. It will be sweet in our mouths. But, it can be bitter to our stomachs (vs. 9-10). It is sweet in our mouths because it reveals the gospel; God’s goodness and grace, His love and mercy, His plans and purposes, His will and His ways. It is bitter to our stomachs because it is a

word of judgment to unbelievers (Beale, 552-53) and a word of persecution and suffering for believers (Osborne, 404; Mounce, 210). MacArthur puts it well to my mind, “All who love Jesus Christ can relate to John’s ambivalence. Believers long for Christ to return in glory, for Satan to be destroyed, and the glorious kingdom of our Lord to be set up on earth, in which He will rule in universal sovereignty and glory while establishing in the world righteousness, truth, and peace. But they, like Paul (Rom. 9:1-3), mourn bitterly over the judgment of the ungodly” (vo. 1, 288). There is joy and sorrow, sweetness and bitterness, gladness and sadness when God’s word does its perfect saving and sanctifying work in our lives.

3) Proclaim the Word 10:11

God, by means of his angel, has a commission (or recommission) for John. Though it is not identical, the commission echoes the Great Commission that the Lord Jesus gave the church (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). These are words of important application for all of us. “You must” sounds a moral imperative, a moral and spiritual obligation. You must prophecy, preach, proclaim again (cf. 1:11, 19). This is a divine mandate and command. He is to prophecy “about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings.” Four fold classifications are common in Revelation occurring 7 times. The inclusion of “kings” is unique and occurs only here. Osborne says, “This is probably

added due to the presence of the “kings of the earth” in 6:15; 16:14; 17:10-11 as rulers of the nations and persecutors of the saints” (Osborne, 405). Like the bittersweet book, proclaiming God’s word to the nations is bittersweet. It is a positive word of redemption to those who believe and it is a bitter word of judgment to those who refuse to repent (9:20-21) and persecute God’s people (11:1-14). Our assignment is to go. Our calling is to proclaim the good news of the gospel. In the midst of judgment, God is announcing through His prophets the good news of His grace revealed in the gospel of His Son. The sweetness of faithful obedience cannot be soured by the bitterness of persecution, rejection, suffering and even death.

Conclusion

Chuck Swindoll is a faithful Bible teacher God has used to bless many, many lives. I count myself as one of those lives. His insight on applying Revelation 10 is just about perfect. I hope it impacts your life like it did mine: “Just like John, we have roles to play in God’s ultimate plan. We can’t call ourselves “apostles,” and we don’t receive literal visions and revelations from God. We’re not required to swallow prophetic books to utter inspired words. But each of us has been given a crucial mission to share the good news of salvation with the world (Matt. 28:19-20). Yet just like John, we must first internalize the message, allowing it to become a part of our own lives.

It's true that the gospel of Jesus Christ involves both bad news and good news – bad news about lost humans subject to divine judgment, but good news about the righteous Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who paid the complete penalty for us and saves us when we simply trust in Him. As ambassadors for Christ in this age, we must not only understand and accept the gospel ourselves, but we must also be able to communicate that message to others. Have you accepted God's commission on your life? Or, like John, are you ready for a recommissioning from God?" (151).