

Lesson # 34 The Mighty Angel, A Little Scroll & 7 Thunders Revelation 10:1-11

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Revelation 10:1-11 (ESV)

¹Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. ²He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, ³and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded. ⁴And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down." ⁵And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven ⁶and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay, ⁷but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.

⁸Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." ⁹So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, "Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." ¹⁰And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter. ¹¹And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings." ①

Introduction to Chapter 10

The 6th Trumpet has sounded (9:13) and the most devastating judgment yet has done its' work. The 7th Trumpet will not sound until Rev. 11:15, so once again, John pauses to give us an interlude – chapter 11 being an account of 2 OT style prophets whom God sends to preach and work miracles in Jerusalem, while chapter 10 introduces an angel, a small scroll and 7 thunderous voices – as John's prophecy continues.

In chapter 10 and the early parts of chapter 11, 2 main elements are presented to us – the announcement that the delay is about to end, and the temple and its' worshippers are measured. The section from 10:1 to 11:14 lays out the developments which lead up to the 7th Trumpet, and there is a foreboding aspect of this section which more than hints at the imminence of the approach of the end. Chapter 10 can be broken into 2 sections: 1.) vv. 1-7 – the amazing announcement; and 2.) the re-commissioning of John to the task.

I. The Mighty Angel

vv. 1-3

“Then I saw”...and with that, a new vision is presented to the reader, and John again becomes involved in the action about to take place, going from observer to participant. The vision begins with “another mighty angel” descending from heaven. The angel is not named, so it is not necessarily Gabriel or Michael as many speculate – we are simply not told who this is. He is not a unique angel, because he is called “another”, meaning he is like the other angels that have been mentioned already.

Some attempt to say that this is Christ Himself because of the description of his descent to John – from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, a rainbow over his head, face like the sun, & legs like pillars of fire, and admittedly, there are some parallels here to Rev. 1:7, 12-16; and the angel even holds a little scroll, and a scroll has been part of the focus of events since Rev. 5.

However, unless this is the lone exception, Jesus is never called an angel in Revelation and the word, “another” (of the same kind) could never be said of Him. Also – **Rev. 10:5-6** absolutely precludes the possibility, as Jesus would never say this – only a created being would say this. The only “mighty angel” mentioned earlier in Rev. 5:2, is likely the one being compared to this one here as “another”, and that one is not Christ either.

Since this angel is said to descend from heaven to John, John has moved from heaven back to earth. The angel being wrapped in a cloud has some symbolic significance, and enhances the regal appearance of this angel. While a cloud is often associated with movement for heavenly beings (Dan. 7:13; Ps. 104:3; Isa. 19:1; Acts 1:9; Rev. 1:7), here the angel is not on the cloud, but wrapped in it. Therefore, it is more likely a symbol of judgment than of glory – in fact, 9 times in the NT the occurrence of clouds are related to judgmentⁱ – Matt. 24:30; 26:24; MK 13:26; 14:62; LK 21:27; Rev. 1:7; 14:14,15,16. It is certainly also used the same way in some eschatological prophecies of the Day of the Lord in the OT prophets as well – cf. **Joel 2:2; Zeph. 1:15; Ezek. 30:3**. The function and message of this angel brings his visit into that category as well. ②

The significance of the other things described by John here is symbolic. The angel has a rainbow over its’ head – likely the result of the face gleaming like the sun – but since the angel is carrying a scroll which contains a message of further judgment, the rainbow is a reminder of Gen. 9:9-17 (the Noahic Covenant), depicting the fact that, even though judgment is coming from God, He is also tempering that judgment with mercy.

The descending angel carries in his hand “a little scroll” and this scroll is open. This is not the scroll that Christ holds in heaven and has been opening, but a smaller one, a different one. There is much debate over what this scroll contains – but it does not make any sense that it is the second half of the book of Revelation because the first scroll is still in force & is still under Christ’s control,

and the 7th Trumpet has not yet sounded. It may contain a small portion (like a copy) of a part of the main scroll, and it is more than likely a part of the re-commissioning of John as a new vision begins with him on earth again (10:11).

This scroll is open, not sealed, and in a parallel account, Ezekiel “ate” the scroll presented to him – Ezek. 2:9-10; 3:2,11 – which was an object lesson and a re-commissioning for him as well. The open scroll signifies the revealed counsel of God’s will, although the 7 Thunders, which sound in Rev. 10:4 are kept as a secret – John is not allowed to record what they say or even who they are – providing a somewhat confusing contrast between revealing and concealing.

The angel takes a symbolic stance – one foot on the land, and a foot on the sea. This implies that he will take possession of both (a la Deut. 11:24). This message is not local, but worldwide, the stance emphasized by the repeated referral to it – v. 5, 8. The point of this vision is that the message continues to be for the whole world, not just local areas.

He calls out with a loud voice immediately and the 7 Thunders sound. It is said to be like when a lion roars – powerful, frightening and intense. This is not just noise however – there is an intelligent message being proclaimed and could be what is described in vv. 6-7. The allusion to 7 Thunders is apparently something John and his readers would be familiar with, but this phrase is lost on us in our culture. In any case, John is told not to record what the 7 Thunders say. Perhaps it is related to the thunderous voice of God the father to Jesus in John 12:28-29; or in Ps. 29:3-9. God’s voice is also compared to thunder in OT passages like I Sam. 7:10; Job 26:4; Ps. 18:13 and to a lion’s roar in Hos. 11:10 & Joel 3:16. ③

II. The 7 Thunders & No Delay vv. 4-7

This incident of John being told not to record what he has just seen and heard is similar to another time when a prophet looking at the end times was told the same thing – **Dan. 12:6-10**. In Daniel’s case, it was too early to share what may be the very information we are now reading in the book of Revelation. However, in John’s case, there seems to be a sense that what the 7 Thunders say is too shocking to record, and must be reserved as a mystery until it is revealed in real time during the Tribulation.

That is borne out by the 3 verses that follow – v. 5 simply restating that this angel is standing on both land and sea, and is the one bringing this message from God, raising his right hand to heaven and swearing (v. 6) by God, and yet God is depicted here as...”by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it...”. There would be no more delay according to the angel’s message. There will be no pause in the action as we saw in 8:1, but immediate action will follow this pronouncement – cf. “How long O Lord” in 8:3-5.

Verse 7 states; *but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.*

This “no more delay” of v. 6 is not saying everything will end at the blowing of the 7th Trumpet, but rather that the culmination of the hidden purpose of God has arrived in conjunction with the last of the trumpet judgmentsⁱⁱ. This yet the second of 3 woes. One more has to come yet.

Coming as it does in the middle of the judgments, 7 Thunders will occur, then 7 bowls, this is a somewhat mystifying pronouncement. What mystery of God would be fulfilled in the blowing of the 7th Trumpet? This verse is the most significant in the chapter and will take some effort to unravel.

Remember that a NT mystery is not something that can be figured out by good detective work. If it is not revealed by God, we will never figure it out. Examples abound in the NT:

- In Rom. 16:25-26 – this refers to God’s redemptive plan which included Jews, Gentiles, a temporary setting aside of the Jews, a remnant, election and the ultimate future salvation of Israel en masse.
- In Eph. 3:1-10 – the church was a mystery not revealed to the OT prophets
- In I Cor. 15:51- “we shall not all sleep”
- In other places, the Antichrist, the delayed Kingdom, etc. were all mysteries unforeseen in the OT

Here in our passage, according to Robert Thomas, what is being revealed is the great purpose of God in the unveiling of human history. IOW – the reason He created it all at all. This ties to the oath of the angel, and the focus of the angel’s oath, and yet still retains some mystery within the pronouncement.

As to the thing being revealed, commentators differ somewhat:

- The secret is of coming judgment within the little scroll (the rest of Revelation) – but why would a scroll be necessary to replace the first one?
- The secret of the 7 Bowls to come, but this too is too narrow, and would be covered in the first scroll.
- The secret of the establishment of God’s Kingdom on earth & the New Jerusalem.
- The casting of Satan from heaven – too restricted.

The best interpretation says that the mystery being revealed is God’s purpose in bringing His Kingdom to fruition.ⁱⁱⁱ This is given some support by what occurs as the 7th Trumpet is blown – cf. 11:15-19. Part of this answer is tied up in God’s very purpose for creating anything in the first place. It was not because he was bored or lonely, but He purposed to create a world, the design of which would perfectly reveal His attributes (all of them) and thus glorify Him to the maximum extent. I believe that Rom. 11:36 carries some of the weight of this concept, as does Col. 1:15-17. Part of the mystery that will be revealed is the wrapping up of evil . Man’s day is at an end and God’s day is dawning.

Some of what will be revealed in the remainder of Revelation is the return of Christ. OT prophets saw suffering and glory and could not decipher how these could occur simultaneously in the Messiah. What they did not anticipate was two advents, separated by His death and resurrection, then a long time period of God's turning His attentions to the Gentiles. The 1,000 year reign, the descriptions of heaven, the New Jerusalem, the final victory of Christ, the eternal banishment of Satan and all the wicked, the Great White Throne judgment, and finally, God and all His people together for eternity in a blissful state of innocence in Paradise were all very shadowy or veiled in the OT. Genesis 3 was paradise lost, and Revelation is paradise restored, with plenty of history in between to get us there.

Verse 7b – “just as He announced it to His servants, the prophets...”. Although this is true biblical mystery, God did have His prophets announce it to His people. The problem was that neither the prophets or the people saw it correctly and did not anticipate the way it would unfold.

Gal. 3:8 offers us a clue that the prophets preached good news. See also Amos 3:7; Jer. 7:23-27; 25:4; Isa. 6:8-13, etc. The good news went out time after time but the people would not listen and obey. The parable of the Vineyard Tenants in Matt. 21:33-46 is Jesus' rebuke of the Israelite leaders who continually killed His prophets and would even kill God's Son when He was revealed to them. They could not envision the Kingdom plans of God which did not line up with their own concepts of military conquest over their own political enemies. This view was generally much too limited as their vision of what the Kingdom was supposed to be was not biblical. Their rejection of Him was one reason Jesus taught in parables – cf. Matt. 13:10-17 and note I Cor. 2:7-11 & II Cor. 4:3-6. ⑤

Ultimately, although the road to the Kingdom is paved with the blood of martyrs^{iv}, the way is delayed by battles against unseen forces of darkness and the road is narrow and the destination never seems to get closer in our lifetime; God's Kingdom will come in His way, in His time and on His terms. The prophecies, when correctly apprehended, point to it and describe it in flowing detail, but as Rom. 9:22-23 tells us, God is patient and allows these deflections, evil and sin along the way to develop and magnify the greatness of the Kingdom to come.

Alva McLean says it like this, quoting the words of James T. Shotwell, “*we are now at the last frontier; and in a sense, history must begin all over again. For it seems quite certain that we shall never again be even measurably safe here on earth until all men without exception have become good men, or until God Himself breaks once more into human history supernaturally – this time to establish with divine omnipotence a Kingdom of righteousness and compassion upon earth, thus supplanting the misrule and impotence of men.*”^v (emphasis is the author's.)

III. The Little Scroll

vv. 8-9

The same voice (either God or Christ) speaks again and John is told to take the scroll which is in the hand of the angel. The 3rd repetition of the angel's stance is again an indicator that we must not lose sight of the fact that the authority pronounced by the angel is worldwide.

John obediently approaches the angel, empowered by the authoritative divine voice and asks for the scroll to be given to him. Previously just an observer, John now enters into the reality and drama of the action. The angel instructs him to take the scroll and “eat it”, which is a Hebrew idiomatic phrase meaning to absorb it's contents – to receive its' knowledge, much like the English word “digest” might be used of reading a book. By “eating it”, John literally shows that he has assimilated the contents of it.^{vi}

Notice **Ezek. 3:1-3** and **Jer. 15:16**. There is no mention of bitterness in either of these accounts, but here John is told by the angel that it will taste sweet as honey, but will make his stomach bitter. In both Ezekiel and Jeremiah, the scrolls layout coming judgment. The bitterness would be an unexpected component of the scroll, hence it is mentioned first. The message within the scroll would affect John's emotions because what had yet to unfold would be breathtakingly horrifying, yet because it was God's word, and also a victorious end and eternal bliss for God's people were promised, it would have a sweetness to it. See **Ps. 119:97-104; 19:7-10**. ⑥

IV. Bittersweet / John is Re-Commissioned vv. 10-11

John takes the scroll and eats it. Whether he literally ate it or read it thoroughly, the result is as the angel predicted – sweet taste, bitter stomach.

The Revelation has not ended – there is more to come and John would continue to be the prophet used of God for the task and most of what he recorded would be very grievous and solemn. Note v. 11 again – “continue to prophesy...” Peoples, nations and languages are mentioned in Rev. 5:9, but this addition of kings here is an important allusion to the fact that Christ is over all of them – He is King of kings and Lord of lords – something John would have seen in this scroll. The scope of the prophecy is restated – worldwide – everyone on earth would be affected by it.

Next lesson – Lesson # 35 The Two Witnesses – Rev. 11:1-6

ⁱ Robert Thomas; Revelation 8-22; p. 61

ⁱⁱ IBID – p. 69

ⁱⁱⁱ IBID, p. 70

^{iv} IBID, p. 73

^v Alva J. McLean; The Greatness of the Kingdom; BMH Books, 19809 reprint; p.xiii in the Preface

^{vi} OP CIT, Thomas, p. 73