

Chapter Ten

The Little Book

The previous chapter dealt with destruction and false doctrine blanketing the land of the Jews, dooming them to spiritual death in the wake of their unrepentant hearts. In this chapter, we see the Gospel coming into view. The earth is covered with smoke, torment, judgment, and hopelessness. Now, the Good News is presented, giving light and life to all, not in a grand pageantry of majesty, but in the form of a small and seemingly insignificant book.

10:1 And I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire;

Prior to the 7th seal, there was silence in heaven for “half an hour,” a period of time where things were suspended while the sealing of believing Israel took place. Now, before the sounding of the 7th trumpet, another interlude is presented. It is a two-fold vision: the mighty angel and the two witnesses.

Strong angel: This is the second of three strong angels, or *powerful messengers*. The first one appears in 5:2, demanding to know whom, in all of creation, is worthy to open the book with the seven seals. All three of these messengers of great authority have words to impart, either by rhetoric (first angel); recorded words (second angel); or by proclamation (third angel—18:21).

Coming down out of heaven: This angel and the New Jerusalem (21:2, 10) are the only two entities in the entire bible which “come down out of heaven.” However, the New Jerusalem descends only from the “new” heaven. (Rev 21:1-2) The angel here is coming down from the *former* heaven. The language conveys a “reaching down” to earth (since this is where the messenger plants his feet). It is Heaven reaching down to touch the earth.

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” says the Lord. “I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” (Heb 8:10)

In other words, God *reaches* down to earth to dwell among His people. The Holy Spirit dwelling within us through His Word is the method by which this is carried out. (1 Cor 12:8; Eph 6:17) The verse in Hebrews speaks of God writing laws upon human hearts. It is the Word coming from God and embraced by mankind. This begins the “renewal” process that will eventually usher in the New Heavens and New Earth. It begins with the Gospel. Those who trivialize the Word of God for the sake of feelings, visions, and false epiphanies are being deceived by the devil.

Clothed with a cloud: Clouds are conveyances used in scripture that transport heavenly beings to earth. Ezekiel's great vision began with a storm cloud accompanied by cherubim. (Eze 1:4) The Son of Man was to come in a cloud. (Luke 21:27) Daniel's vision showed the Son of Man coming with clouds. (Dan 7:13) However, this angel is *clothed* with a cloud, signifying he is *covered*. Any time something is covered, there's an implication that something else is hidden or *lessened*. Note:

The young men...will fall by the sword, and the women will go into captivity. ...the *day will be dark* (less light because of clouds) when I break there the yoke bars of Egypt. Then the pride of her power will cease in her; (How?) *a cloud will cover her*, and her daughters will go into captivity. (Ezek 30:17-18)

This angel then is a *strong* messenger—a messenger of great and powerful authority. However, he is also *covered*; he is not fully *revealed*. He seems to be a symbol of Christ. Terms are used interchangeably to describe angels and God:

- He is clothed with a cloud (Psa 104:3)
- There's a rainbow above his head (Rev 4:3)
- His face is as the sun (Rev 1:16; Mal 4:2; Luke 1:78)
- His legs are like pillars of fire (Exo 13:21, 22; Rev 1:15)

The bible elsewhere uses the term 'angel' or 'angel of the Lord' to describe men, God, or Christ. The word simply means *messenger*. Jesus Christ was the first 'strong messenger' to deliver the Good News to mankind.

Rainbow upon his head: The rainbow is a symbol of an agreement or covenant (see notes on 4:3). The head is symbolic of authority. (1 Cor 11:3) This is an authoritative or strong messenger, and the covenant he brings has great authority and strength. Christ is called the Head of the Church, meaning He is the authority over her. (Eph 1:22; 4:15; Col 2:10) "The head (authority) is the elder and honorable man." (Isa 9:14-15) Thus, the rainbow comes with great power and honor. It represents the New Covenant in Christ, as "head over all things." (Eph 1:22)

Face like the sun: His countenance or *person* was that of pure truth (see notes on 1:16).

Feet like pillars of fire: A pillar of fire always signified God's presence to *guide* the children of Israel. (Exo 13:21; Num 14:14; Neh 9:12) Feet, by their nature, carry the body, or *guide* it. They serve as the human body's foundation. These descriptions all refer to Christ:

His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze...His face was like the sun shining in its strength. (Rev 1:14-16)

10:2 and he had in his hand a little book which was open. And he placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land;

Little book: A book of insignificance, more correctly translated 'little scroll' or 'booklet.' It is not some weighty tome full of mysteries and difficult chapters, but a simple message; a message that is *revealed* (open).

A book can be a record of historical events (Deut 31:24; Josh 10:13), laws (Josh 1:8), records (Est 6:1), customs (Est 9:32), or personal events. (1 Kgs 11:41) When John “eats” this booklet (verse 9), it tastes sweet, but its truth is painful. The context suggests it to be the Good News. Jesus’ words—“many are called but few are chosen” (Matt 22:14)—shows the bittersweet aspect of the Gospel. Many hear the word of hope, but few are willing to obey it. (Matt 16:24)

Right foot on the sea: We have here the angel putting one foot (pillar of fire—God’s guidance) on the nations. The waves of the sea are a metaphor describing the unstable and pagan nations. (Jude 1:13) In prophecy, it refers to the nations (Matt 13:47), from where the beast is born. (Rev 13:1) In Daniel 7:3, four beasts rise from the *sea*, but an angel explains to Daniel that they are four kingdoms that arise from the *earth*. (Dan 7:17) In the new heavens and earth, there is no more sea (Rev 21:1), implying the absence of nations and their negative attributes.

Left foot on the land: God’s guiding light (pillar of fire) is also established on the land. The *land* typically refers to the *land of Judah*, a nation separated from the other nations (sea). *Land* is used in scripture to mean the earth in general. (Gen 7:4; Deut 12:1; Jud 18:10) Many times, it simply means *inhabited* land. Although Egypt suffered a severe famine, the bible says it covered the face of the *earth*. (Gen 41:56) The Israelites were promised an inheritance of land by God. Land was to become a permanent family heritage. (1 Kings 21) God called the dry land earth (Gen 1:10), signifying its separation from the sea. In the same way, the Jews were separated from the other nations. It can be possessed, while the sea cannot. The land can be planted in order to bear fruit, whereas the sea cannot. The angel planting his feet signifies an establishment of authority and guidance over nations, peoples, tongues, and tribes. The Gospel is to be preached to both Jews *and* Gentiles, to both land *and* sea.

In scripture, planting one’s foot on something meant to claim it as their own. When Joshua planted his feet on the necks of the five kings he was demonstrating his victory over them.

10:3 and he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars; and when he had cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices.

Loud voice: Words heard in heaven *and* earth (See notes on 5:2). These words were as a roaring lion, meaning that they were uttered with great and fearful authority. (Prov 19:12) Again, this angel is Christ Himself who brings the Good News of the kingdom to earth.

They will walk after the Lord, He will roar like a lion; indeed He will roar, and His sons will come trembling from the west. (Hosea 11:10)

Although wicked people (Psa 22:13), wicked rulers (Prov 28:15), and Satan (1 Pet 5:8) are all symbols of a roaring lion, the context does not suggest that here. Jesus Christ’s great and powerful authority is being described.

Seven peals of thunder: As His voice (Exo 19:16, 19; Job 26:14; 37:2-7; 40:9), thunder typically appears as God’s pronouncement of judgment. (1 Sam 2:10) It is first heard when He rained hail upon Egypt. (Exo 9:23)

The number ‘7’ indicates the *complete* message of God about to be spoken. The idea here is that Christ was establishing His presence and authority upon the earth. It is done in a two-pronged move: judgment upon rebellious men and nations (chapter 9), and the introduction of the Good News.

10:4 And when the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken, and do not write them.”

This voice of God, represented by the thunder, is not revealed to us *now*. They are sealed, or closed up so as not to be *understood*. However, these peals of thunder speak again near the end of the Revelation, where their words are revealed:

I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as *the sound of mighty peals of thunder*, saying, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” (Rev 19:6-7)

If this is the same message John was told not to write, it means that the bride (the church) was not yet ready to be presented to Christ. The words could not be recorded because Christ had not yet begun to reign and the church was not yet ready for presentation.

10:5-6 And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that there shall be delay no longer,

Christ was establishing His authority and rightly proves that authority by swearing on “Him who lives forever and ever,” the Creator of that earth that death and sin had held in bondage for so long. In the OT, raising the right hand always accompanied the giving of an oath. (Gen 14:22, 23; Deut 32:40-43)

There shall be delay no longer implies that something had been delayed, not to mention the bride not being ready for the marriage feast. Some may interpret this to mean the Great Judgment. However, the next verse reveals that the delay concerns the mystery of God, the Good News foretold by the prophets of old. The language is very similar to that of the Song of Moses, found in Deuteronomy 32.

In Daniel 12, we see another “delay,” and the question asked, “How long until the end of these wonders?” (Dan 12:6) Daniel heard the answer: it would be for a time, times, and half a time; as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be completed. (Dan 12:7) The “holy people” were the Jews. They were to be set apart for God’s purposes, not that they were “holy and righteous” in the way we would think. They ultimately rejected the Messiah, and were therefore marked for destruction, as Daniel had predicted.

When we examine the oaths spoken in the Song of Moses and Daniel, a prediction of judgment and destruction are evident. Both oaths invoke one of God’s titles—to Him who lives forever and ever. From this, we can deduce that Revelation is drawing from this same imagery. When the angel cried out, he asked “How long until the end?” The Seven Thunders respond, “no one knows the day and hour, except the Father.” The problem we get into today, is that we take this highly charged poetic language, and run with it into some future context. God began the bible, describing the issue of man’s fall, not how dinosaurs came into being, or if He made life on other planets, etc. He ends the bible the same way. It is speaking of man’s redemption from sin. The earth’s future is not our concern, it is our salvation and the mystery of His redemptive purpose in Jesus Christ that is.

10:7 but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets.

Mystery of God: The Greek word *musterion* only appears concerning the interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. (Daniel 2:18-19, 27-30, 47) However, the OT has no mysteries of the pagan type, where divine secrets were privy to a chosen few. The whole Israelite people partook of the religion of Jehovah through their representatives, the priests. There was no system of ceremonial initiation by which the few had privileges denied to the many. God has His secrets, but such things as He revealed belonged to all. (Deut 29:29) They weren't silent, so to speak, but openly proclaimed. (Deut 6:7; Neh 8:1ff) It was by true piety that men had an exchange with God. (Psa 25:14; Prov 3:32)

To the Western mind, a mystery is something that cannot be fathomed. This is why many believe Revelation cannot be understood. But in the Greek, *revelation* means *a revealed secret*. Parables were mysteries, spiritual secrets spoken in a veiled form. However, they were *revealed* to those had the key to their inner meaning. (Matt 13:34-35; cf. John 16:29)

The doctrines of Christ and of His Kingdom are hidden to the worldly wise (Matt 1:25; 1 Cor 2:6ff) and from all who are outside the kingdom. (Matt 13:11ff) There are even truths hidden from "babes in Christ," who are not yet ready to take hold of them due to their spiritual immaturity. (1 Cor 3:1; Heb 5:11-14)

God's mysteries are not hidden by any secrecy of the message itself, or due to any reserve on God's part, but by the receptive capacity of the hearer. Being carnally-minded, immoral, or worldly makes people "blind" to the light of the Gospel. (2 Cor 4:24) God's secrets are intentionally exposed through Christ.

The seventh angel is the one holding the seventh trumpet, the last trumpet of God. When he is *almost ready to sound*, then this mystery of God would be finished. The apostles received this mystery first. (Mark 4:11) It was the mystery of which Paul spoke. (1 Cor 2:7) It had been "for ages hidden in God." (Eph 3:9) *which is, Christ in you, the hope of glory.* (Col 1:27)

The things that God announced beforehand *by the mouth of all the prophets*, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled. (Acts 3:18)

As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. (1 Pet 1:10-11)

...the Gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord... (Rom 1:1-4)

The mystery of God is, then, that Jesus was born, lived, died, and was resurrected in order to forgive the sins and bring believers to life. It is the Gospel. However, it also included Christ's *presence* upon the earth through His abiding in the hearts of believers. God wasn't going to issue another set of commandments; He would come down from the mountain Himself. Not in a presentation upon stone tablets, but written on the human heart. (2 Cor 6:16; Heb 8:10)

Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. (Acts 9:15; Rom 11:13; 15:16; Gal. 2:7; Eph 3:8) He said that it was his commission to "fulfill the word of God." (Col 1:25-27) To fulfill the mystery meant that the

gospel be had to be “preached to every creature under heaven.” (Col 1:23) Three times Paul indicated that this was already fulfilled in his day. (Rom 10:18; Col 1:6, 23) In his final epistle, when his second trial before Nero was approaching, he said, “the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.” (2 Tim 4:17)

There is the strongest reason to believe that, before the reigns of Diocletian and Constantine, the faith of Christ had been preached in every province and in all the great cities of the empire; but the foundation of the several congregations, the numbers of the faithful who composed them, and their proportion to the unbelieving multitude, are now buried in obscurity or disguised by fiction and declamation.

Christianity’s progress was not confined to the Roman Empire. According to the primitive fathers, who interpret facts by prophecy, within a century after the death of Christ, the new religion had already visited every part of the globe.¹

Paul had fulfilled that commission and was now ready to go to heaven. Since the gospel had been made fully known and preached to every creature (nation) under heaven within the compass of Paul’s ministry, the voice of the seventh angel may be safely placed within the general vicinity and time frame of the apostle’s martyrdom. This is the point at which Jesus said the end would come upon Jerusalem:

This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, *and then the end will come.* (Matt 24:14)²

In a national sense, the Law separated Jew and Gentile. (Eph 2:14-16) It was the removal of this separation, coupled with Jerusalem’s destruction that “greased the wheels” so that both groups could be united in Christ. This was the mystery that Christ came to fulfill.

10:8 And the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard again speaking with me, and saying, “Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land.”

The same voice that commanded to seal up the things spoken by the voice of God now speaks to John. He is instructed to retrieve this open book, this *unsealed* and *understandable* communication from the Messiah who is “standing” among the nations of the world.

10:9-10 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.

Eat it: Consume it into your very being. This is the same language used in Ezekiel 3, where the young prophet was told to eat the scroll, which was sweet in his mouth but made his innermost being bitter. The word of God tastes good, but its Truth is hard to bear when men do not pay it heed.

¹ *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Edward Gibbon, Vol I, Chap15, p. 584, 592

² Most will not accept this interpretation. Preachers and their followers insist that the Great Commission will continue until Christ comes a second time. If so, then Paul did not tell the truth, when he said that the gospel had been “proclaimed in all creation under heaven.” (Col 1:23) It’s high time we “unlearned” what we’ve been led to believe, accept the facts as presented in the bible, and quit trying to force the puzzle pieces to fit into our own understanding.

So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away; and I went embittered in the rage of my spirit, and the hand of the Lord was strong on me. (Ezek 3:14)

It will make your stomach bitter: *Stomach* often refers to the inner being. Solomon wrote, “In much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.” (Eccl 1:18) The scroll given to Ezekiel was full of terrible predictions concerning a disobedient Israel. John’s scroll is similar: *here is Good News, but it will be rejected.*

10:11 And they said to me, “You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.”

The implication is that *because* the Gospel message was bitter, John had to continue preaching. He is not to preach *to* various people, but prophesy *about* them. Note the correlation with Ezekiel:

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 being sent to a people of unintelligible speech or difficult language, but to the house of Israel, nor to many peoples of unintelligible speech or difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. But I have sent you to them who should listen to you; yet the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, since they are not willing to listen to Me. Surely the whole house of Israel is stubborn and obstinate.” (Ezek 3:4-7)

The sweet: *I have sent you to them who should listen to you...*

The bitter: *They are not willing to listen to Me.*

Moreover, He said to me, “Son of man, take into your heart all My words which I shall speak to you, and listen closely. And go to the exiles, to the sons of your people, and speak to them and tell them, whether they listen or not, ‘Thus says the Lord God’” (the honey). (Ezek 3:10-11)

If Revelation was written *circa* 96 AD, as many claim, John would have been a very old man, and unlikely able to carry out such a commission. In fact, Jesus implied that John would be alive when He returned. (John 21:22, 23) All of the hope of the prophets, apostles, and early church was bound up in the coming of the Christ and the kingdom He would establish. Unfortunately, most today still see these events as yet to be fulfilled. This is exactly what the Pharisees expected and they were wrong. They failed to recognize Christ when He came the first time; the church has failed to recognize His Second Coming.

We see here then a picture of God establishing His message upon the earth, seen by the holy messenger standing on land and sea. The Gospel was to be preached to the world, but the bitter truth: *Narrow is the gate that leads to life and few who find it.* (Matt 7:13) The delay in these events may be summed up in God’s indulgence coming to an end:

Having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, *having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.* (Acts 17:30-31)