

Study 11: Revelation Chapter 10

Introduction

“...Chapters 8 and 9 depicted the warning judgements on the oppressor. Though they were only warnings, they were severe. The oppressor should have repented, but he didn't. He only further hardens his heart and blasphemes. In this he reminds us of Pharaoh. Such steadfast wickedness is a fearful thing to witness – it produces fear in the timid. There is nothing as awe-inspiring as to see incarnate hatred and spite clawing for victory, even though it knows it's a loser. The saints need assurance in the face of this underlying malice...”

Body of the Study

Introduction

An Assurance

A Prohibition

A Vindication

A Commissioning

Homework and preparation for next week:

Re-read chapter 10

Read the notes as a review of the study

Read chapter 11 in preparation for the next study

Think about times in your own life when the gospel has had the bitter-sweet traits that John describes from eating the little scroll. Why was it sweet, and why was it sour?

Notes for study 11: Revelation Chapter 10

“...Chapters 8 and 9 depicted the warning judgements on the oppressor. Though they were only warnings, they were severe. The oppressor should have repented, but he didn't. He only further hardens his heart and blasphemes. In this he reminds us of Pharaoh. Such steadfast wickedness is a fearful thing to witness – it produces fear in the timid. There is nothing as awe-inspiring as to see incarnate hatred and spite clawing for victory, even though it knows it's a loser. The saints need assurance in the face of this underlying malice¹...”

Introduction

Chapter 10 begins a second interlude which ends in 11:13 when the second woe is past, and the third is about to come quickly. During this interlude, John eats a little book! Like the previous interlude, this one is designed to bring about emphasis and anticipation in the visions that follow.

An Assurance

John sees yet another angel, who is also described as *a mighty angel*. Whilst there are some similarities between the description follows, and with Christ at the Throne scene, it is clear that this was *a messenger* from God and Christ, and not the Christ Himself. “...Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars...” (10:1 NIV). The description of the rainbow, his face brilliant like the sun, and the fiery pillars of his legs, suggest that he was close to God, and therefore the message he brings is from Him.

The message was in his hand “...He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land...” (10:2 NIV). The message was not sealed up like the big scroll (5:1), but was open to view. With a foot on both the land and the sea, he had dominion over all of the earth. Hailey notes²:

The sealed book, apparently much larger than this “little book” sets forth the destiny of God's eternal purpose, and its contents could be made known only by the Lamb who had overcome. This small book sets forth only one aspect of God's purpose, and was already open, indicating that John could assimilate and understand it. The significance of the little book is made known later (vv. 9-11).

The NIV Bible Commentary adds:

The angel has in his hand a small scroll (v. 2)--not to be confused with the Lamb's scroll of chs. 5-7 but connected with the symbolic scroll of Ezekiel (Eze 2:9-3:3; cf. Jer 15:15-17). This prophet was told to “eat” the scroll, just as John is told to eat the scroll given him (vv. 9-10). Such an action symbolized the reception of the Word of God into one's innermost being as a necessary prerequisite to proclaim it with confidence. John could see the words on the scroll because it “lay open” in the angel's hand. The angel standing on both land and sea symbolizes that the prophetic message is for the whole world. (NIVBC)

The instruction was loud and clear “...and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke...” (10:3 NIV). The instructions were to be heard by everyone³:

¹ McGuiggan, p. 141

² Hailey, p. 242

³ Hailey, p. 243

The words of His prophets caused men to fear as when a lion roars (Amos 3:8). So now, what this angel says should be heard and heeded by all, both the wicked and God's own. The seven thunders responded to the angel's cry with voices of their own.

A Prohibition

Not all of God's will has been (or is to be) revealed to us, and John was instructed not to write down what he heard. "...*And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down."...*" (10:4 NIV). These things were made known to John, but the purpose of the sealing was that he was not to reveal them to us⁴:

These majestic voices of thunder should help us understand that these seven thunders carried some foreboding of power and judgement. ... We shall never know what the message or words were. The purpose of inserting this in the revelation is most likely to assure His saints that God has many unrevealed weapons in His arsenal of judgements to be used at His discretion; man cannot know all of God's ways.

A Vindication

The angel turns to God, and makes a sworn declaration "...*Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven...*" (10:5 NIV). The act of raising his right hand is a gesture of submission to God's authority. "...*And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay!..."*" (10:6 NIV). What does the expression "*There will be no more delay*" mean? Hailey notes⁵:

Does the sounding of the seventh trumpet "usher in the completion when the clock of time shall finally stand still" as Lenski and others view it? Or does it usher in the completeness of the gospel plan and the church according to that plan? Vine says, "Speaking broadly *chronos* expresses the duration of a period," and continues by stating that in Revelation 10:6 it "has the meaning of delay." ... In the light of the overall context, i.e., the prayers of the saints (8:3-5), the trumpets of judgements which followed (8:7-9:21), and the remainder of the vision and the sounding of the seventh trumpet (10:8-11:19), it seems best to interpret the angel as saying that there shall be no more delay before the fulfillment of the divine purpose regarding the fortunes of the church on earth.

The sounding of the seventh trumpet – or to be specific when the seventh angel is *about to sound* the trumpet – the end of the period would be completed "...*But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."...*" (10:7 NIV). Hailey notes⁶:

Is this verse speaking of the end of time and the point of entrance into eternity, or is it dealing with the end of delay for the fulfillment of the divine purpose respecting the church? ... The view that this passage is not speaking of the final end of time is supported by the angel's introduction of the seventh angel's sounding, which would bring to pass the third woe. ... The third woe was to come quickly, but the end of time did not come speedily, at once, or without delay; in fact, after nineteen hundred years it has not yet come. Therefore, what was to be without delay was something other than the end of time; thus, it must have been the completion of the mystery.

⁴ Hailey, p. 243

⁵ Hailey, p. 244

⁶ Hailey, p. 245

This is confirmed by the reference to *the announcement of his servants the prophets*. Whilst this could be a reference to the New Testament prophets (or *all* the prophets – both Old and New Testament), the context fits with the confirmation and announcement that the Old Testament prophets brought concerning the Messiah. This connection is also confirmed by Hailey⁷:

This special identification of prophets as “his servants” occurs only here in the New Testament, which leads to the conclusion that in these two instances the angel refers to the Old Testament prophets.

If this conclusion is correct, then this statement points to the completion of God’s plan and not the end of time and entrance into eternity. ... This point considered further in the light of 11:15-19 seems to clearly establish the fact that this angel’s message looked not to the end of time but to the completion of God’s mystery, the gospel, the firm establishment of His kingdom and power, and the destruction of world powers.

A Commissioning

John receives another instruction “...*Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it..."*” (10:8-9 NIV). This seems like a confusing instruction! Why was John to eat the scroll, and what did it mean? Hailey notes⁸:

He was to fill his belly and bowels with it, thus mastering its contents thoroughly; his whole being was to be saturated with the message from God...

But it was a bitter-sweet outcome “...*It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.*”¹⁰ *I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour...*” (10:9-10 NIV). This is an analogy of what God’s word accomplishes in the hearts of men⁹:

The reception and comprehension of God’s word is sweet, but fraught with bitterness of spirit in the condemnation of sinners and the proclamation of Scripture’s judgements against men and nations, declaring the consequences of disobedience, the wickedness of sin, and the terror and finality of judgement.

The NIV Bible Commentary adds:

John, like Ezekiel, is now commanded to take the prophetic scroll and eat it. The scroll tasted "as sweet as honey" but was bitter to the stomach. Receiving the Word of God is a great joy; but since the Word is an oracle of judgment, it results in the unpleasant experience of proclaiming a message of wrath and woe (cf. Jer 15:16, 19). The symbolic act of eating the scroll might also mean that the prophetic message was mixed with joy and comfort as well as gloom. The sweetness should not be taken to refer to the joy of

Alternate Views of the Text

Wallace (p.204) connects the little book to the scroll unsealed and opened by Christ. However, he does not show how this connects to the destruction of Jerusalem:

“It was therefore no longer sealed, no longer a mystery, but now an open book. When it was sealed it seemed large. Unknown things are greater in seeming proportion than the things that are known. They become simplified and minimized in proportion to the knowledge of them. When the seals within the book were loosed, or revealed, it became an open book, and it was *a little book* compared with knowing and not knowing its contents.”

⁷ Hailey, p. 246

⁸ Hailey, p. 247

⁹ Hailey, p. 247

proclaiming a message of wrath, for to all God's prophets this was a sorrowful, bitter task (Jer 9:1). (NIVBC).

John was then instructed to prophesy again, which probably referred to the things that he wrote in the remainder of the letter. Up to around this point in the letter, the visions have been about the unfolding of God's revelation through the gospel, and the suffering and persecution of the Christians in the early period of the church under the Roman persecution. But the scenario will soon change. "...Then I was told, 'You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.'..." (10:11 NIV). Hailey supports this idea¹⁰:

Probably the fresh charge to prophesy concerning "peoples and nations and tongues and kings" refers to the prophecies of chapters 11-22, the second section of the book. In it we shall find that judgements of strong secular powers, religious forces, and worldly seductive influences, together with the victory of God's people over all these antagonists, occupy the attention of the seer with more specific application. We believe this to be the significance of the seer's eating the little book, and of its sweetness and bitterness. It was sweet to learn that God's cause would be victorious in His saints, but it was bitter to prophesy of their suffering and of the destructive judgements which would befall the wicked world.

Alternate Views of the Text

Wallace (p.207) connects the statement "*when the seventh angel is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished*" with the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish era:

"This mystery of God is that divine plan of Ephesians 1:9-10, which was to reach its fulfilment "in the dispensation of the fullness of times," and here the reference is to the "finish" of all events connected with its success. (Matt. 24:14) And it was accomplished for Jesus said, "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world as a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

"In verse 31, of this discourse of Matthew 24, the Lord said that after these events of the destruction of Jerusalem he would "send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet" to "gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." These statements in Matthew and Revelation are parallel in meaning and alike had reference to the universal expansion of the kingdom of Christ, after the fall of Judaism and the end of the Jewish state.

"The destruction of Jerusalem, the demolition of the temple, the downfall of Judaism, and the end of Jewish state, which politically and practically ended the Jewish dispensation, were all a part of the divine mystery. The Mosaic law had been "nailed to the cross," "abolished" and "taken away"; but the Jewish state continued, and in that sense the Jewish dispensation functioned, until "the days of the voice of the seventh angel" which sounded the final doom. This was all in and part of "the mystery of God," the divine scheme of things, which was "finished" in the culmination of these events.

¹⁰ Hailey, p. 248