



Part 23 – The Little Scroll

Revelation 10:1-11

Like the interlude between the sixth and seventh seals, the interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets provides two pictures of God's people. Both pictures portray a threatened but ultimately safe and secured church in a sinful world; a people who are persecuted but sealed by God. Chapter ten raises the question of how God's people can be overcomers in a world that is hostile toward God. Even more specifically, how do we hold on to God's hard words in a hard age? Is God able to keep his beloved flock safe even as he pours out his judgment upon the world?

"Such misgivings, natural though they may be when the world gives way around us, reveal an underestimation of God's strategic capabilities to focus his judgment on its deserving targets. The history of God's acts of judgment and rescue demonstrates his sharpshooting skills (2 Pet. 2:4-9)."¹

"Another Mighty Angel"

Vs. 1 – The mighty angel reminds us of the angel who called out earlier in John's vision, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals?" (5:2). Here, this same angel descends from heaven with an open scroll to deliver to John. This angel reflects the glory of the eternal Son of God. It is no wonder why some scholars have concluded that this mighty angel is actually the glorified Christ. However, for a variety of reasons, it is best to favor the view that this is an angel whose glory is a reflection of his Master's. Consider the similar glory of the angel in Daniel's vision (10:5; 12:14). Recall how Moses radiated the Lord's glory when he met with him (Exodus 34:29-35; 2 Corinthians 3:18). Angels are mighty representatives of the Lord, doing his bidding and acting upon his authority for the sake of the saints on earth.

Vs. 2 – The "little scroll"² that is opened and delivered to John is the same scroll depicted in chapters six and eight which had been sealed with seven seals. It may be that the scroll is described as being "little" because the angel will command John to eat it.

The first verse of the Book of Revelation prepared us to understand a chain of transmission from God to his servant John: The Father – the Son – an angel – John – the church.

The mighty angel, being a holy representative of the Lord, demonstrates the Lord's worldwide sovereignty by standing on the land and the sea. The Lord's universal authority will become all the more poignant when the beast from the sea and the beast from the land appear (chapter 13).

Vv. 3-4 – The angel's loud shout which sounds like a lion's roar reminds us of the authority of the One he represents who is depicted as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (5:5). The "seven thunders" are not explained. Interestingly, they provide a fourth cycle of judgments, the number four being symbolic of a world-wide experience.³ Given that these seven thunders are announced to John (and sealed) between the sixth and seventh trumpet, it is clear that they represent the final judgment - the end of the age.

It is likely that John is commanded to seal up the seven thunders because they relate to a time confined to a future generation (Remember, the seals, trumpets, and bowls depict the entire age between Christ's first and second advents). If this is the case, then it would allude to Daniel's vision when he is commanded to "close" or "seal" the scroll upon which he has recorded visions of a distant future (8:26; 12:9).⁴

Vv. 5-7 – The Lord's authority over the cosmos is grounded in the fact that he is the almighty creator of all things (vs. 6). The angel raises his right hand in a solemn vow to the Lord that with the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the end will come.

Once again, we see how the trumpet cycle recapitulates the same historical epoch as the seven seals, each concluding with a depiction of the end of the age (8:1-5; 11:15-19). This same history is recapitulated in the seven bowls (16:17-21). The consummation of the age brings final redemption for the church and final judgment to the enemies of God (10:7; 15:1; 16:17). In the next chapter John will use Daniel's way of depicting delay ("time, times and half a time") to describe the present age in which God's people must endure suffering as they faithfully give witness to Christ.

¹ Dennis Johnson, *The Triumph of the Lamb* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001) p. 156

² The terms translated 'scroll' and 'little scroll' are nearly identical (*biblidarion*; *biblaridion*).

³ Ian Paul, *Revelation*, TCNT (Downers Grove; IVP Academic, 2018) p. 189

⁴ Ibid

"The trumpet cycle portrayed the restrained ravages of war, affecting only a third of the earth, sea, rivers, and sky: the Lord's long-suffering alarms, summoning the earth's inhabitants to repentance (9:21). When the seventh trumpet sounds, however, no cycle of thunder judgments will follow, further delaying the end. The seventh trumpet is the last trumpet (1 Cor. 15:52), and when it sounds no further opportunity for repentance will remain...God will not allow human rebellion to trace an endless cycle of injustice and misery; in fact, he hastens to his people's relief (Luke 18:7-8)."⁵

The open scroll is God's plan for history which includes the final redemption of his people. It is the "mystery" that was revealed to the prophets. It was a mystery at that time because it would not be fully understood until the finished work of Christ. The term translated "announced" (*euangelizomai*) means to announce good news (Mark 1:14-15; Acts 8:12; 1 Peter 1:12). We call it "the gospel."

The Prophet Eats the Scroll

Vs. 8 – The voice John hears is that of the Lord who earlier commanded the seven thunders to be sealed. Here he tells John to take the unsealed scroll from the hand of the mighty angel.

Vv. 9-10 – The command to take and eat the scroll alludes to the prophet Ezekiel's vision (2:9-3:3) in which the prophet is given a sealed scroll which God opens and commands him to eat. Here John is given an already open scroll to eat. The scroll given to Ezekiel is made up of words of judgment (Ezekiel 2:10). Nevertheless, it tastes sweet in the prophet's mouth because it is the word of God. John's description begins with the scroll's bitterness in his stomach in contrast to the sweetness of its taste. Ezekiel's message will be bitter since it is one of woe, but it is sweet to him because it encompasses God's sovereign plan for his people's salvation. For John, the message is both sweet and sour for him and his hearers.

"The message brings the consolation of hope that God will fulfill his purposes, but it also brings the suffering (tribulation) of opposition that demands he exercise patient endurance (1:9). For his hearers, there is also both sweet and sour, in (on the one hand) the offer of redemption made freely available in the Lamb who was slain, but (on the other) the suffering to be endured by the saints and the judgment that is sure to come on those who refuse to repent."⁶

Vs. 11 – John's prophetic task will be hard. He must continue to proclaim a message that the world will hate. And this mission is precisely what John and the other apostles passed on to the church.

1. We are stewards of a gospel and an ethic which are hated in the world.

The Christian message and way of life will put us at odds with the world. God's Word is sweet, but it is also hard at many points. The gospel exposes sin and confronts sinners with the word of the cross. It promises salvation but also implicitly warns of judgment for those who do not repent. In our own day the gospel remains a scandalous message. God's words concerning his design for man and woman, marriage, and sexuality are perceived by many as harsh or bigoted or outmoded. For many of us, God's words about money or love for neighbor or how we treat an enemy are particularly hard, even unwelcome. God's Word is truly sweet. But for sinners (and even Christians, at times), the words are bitter.

2. Do not undo with your life what you say with your mouth.

As the two sections of this present interlude point out, the church is in the world to proclaim the salvation of God in Jesus Christ. We are good news people in a world under judgment. We are called to be the light of the world, a city set upon a hill. What a tragedy, then, for us to undermine the good news of sins forgiven by continuing to live in sin ourselves. The impact of Christian hypocrisy is profound. And while everyone has moral agency and is responsible for their own decisions, let us never be a ready excuse for someone to reject the gospel. God's Word is, by necessity, a stumbling block as sinners must wrestle with the command to repent. Our lives should not be an additional stumbling block.

3. Remember the One whose message we proclaim.

At the heart of this passage is the sovereignty and power of the One whom the mighty angel represents. The Lord possesses all authority over heaven and earth. He is the Almighty Creator of all things. Therefore, we need not fear the world. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah has won, and we stand in his shadow.

⁵ Dennis Johnson, p. 161

⁶ Ian Paul, 192