

When God Told a Man to Eat a Book

Looking Again at God's People

In sounding the trumpets, God is alerting all those who do not know Him before closing the door of opportunity. By bringing judgments as a foretaste, He is warning them of the seven plagues that will come later. We will notice there is a close parallel between the trumpet plagues and the seven last plagues.

But what has been happening to the church during this time? And what is the church called to do?

By now, we would expect to hear the seventh trumpet sound but before this final trumpet is sounded (see Revelation 11:15), there is an interlude to answer these questions.

This section in Revelation is different in character to the trumpet vision proper. Instead of horrific judgments, natural catastrophes and the fate of the wicked, we find prophecy, preaching and the experience of God's people.

But is the interlude of Revelation 10 and 11 connected in some way to the trumpets, or do the two visions have nothing to do with each other?

We can answer this question with certainty. You may remember that Revelation 8:13 described three woes that would occur during the sounding of the last three trumpets. Then Revelation 9:12 said: "The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come."

So the first woe is obviously the fifth trumpet (see Revelation 9:1-11) and the second woe clearly begins when the sixth trumpet sounds (see Revelation 9:13), but when does the second woe end? Revelation 11:14 gives the answer:

"The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon."

Then we have the sounding of the seventh trumpet in verse 15, when God takes up His kingdom and brings closure.

The ending of the second woe—the sixth trumpet—which involves demonic activity is declared to have ended in Revelation 11:14. This means Revelation 10:1 to 11:14 (regarding the eating of the book with its sweet and bitter experiences) is dealing with the same events as the sixth trumpet from a different perspective. That is, it informs us regarding the experiences of the true followers of Jesus as they seek to preach the good news about Jesus to the world. It would seem from this interlude that this will be done with great opposition.

This is also the time of the sealing (see Revelation 7:1-4) and the gathering for the battle of Armageddon (see Revelation 16:13-16). The core of the sixth trumpet is just before the close of probation (see Revelation 10:7).

In Revelation 10 and 11, God is preparing people to stand for Him during this difficult time. They are called to preach the gospel and face the consequences for doing this.

The Big Picture

The language of the Old Testament shows how God works through history (as He did with Israel) to bring judgment on those who have been persecuting His covenant people.

The trumpets sounding show that God is influencing history, even though His people have not always recognised it. They relate to:

- The Jews at the destruction of Jerusalem
- The Roman Empire as the counterpart of ancient Babylon
- The Medieval church
- The modern secular society, pictured as an age of darkness in the absence of light from Jesus and the gospel.

The way is now prepared to sound the fifth and sixth trumpets, leading into demonic activity and the battle of Armageddon. While the sixth trumpet is sounding, we have the events of Chapter 10 to tell us what is happening to Jesus' followers during this time.

The message in Revelation 10 is organised into two parts:

- **Verses 1-7:** a strong angel with a little scroll open.
- **Verses 8-11:** John is told to preach or prophesy again.

The fulfilment of 10:7 coincides with the events of the sixth trumpet when demonic forces are released on earth (see Revelation 9:13-16). The world will be split into two camps: while Satan's forces mass for the final conflict (see Revelation 9:13-21), God prepares and empowers a people to counteract that threat (see Revelation 10:7 and 11:11-13).

The Angel and the Little Scroll

▷ Read Revelation 10:1-7

Some scholars have noted that the description of this angel resembles the description of Christ in Revelation 1:13-15 and have viewed this angel as Christ himself. Others do not see this angel as Christ

because Christ is never referred to as an angel in Revelation. We can, however, say with certainty that this angel is mighty and similar in appearance to Christ, with authority that comes from Christ the Lamb, who was opening the scroll. Now the scroll is open.

Many recent studies have sustainably argued that the scroll taken by the Lamb in Revelation 5 and the open scroll here are the same. In Revelation 5:2, we have a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice: "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" The Lamb then begins to open the scroll by loosening the seals.

As we go through the second half of the Book of Revelation, we find out about the contents of the book that is now open. Commencing in Revelation 12, John's vision focuses more and more on the final events of human history.

Connecting the Two Books

In Revelation, we see the book in the hand of the Lamb being unsealed from chapter 5 onward and the book now open in the hand of the angel of Chapter 10.

Over the years, scholars have not considered the two books or scrolls to be the same because different words are used in the



Angel with the little Scroll—Wood engraving after a drawing by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (German painter, 1794-1872), published in 1877 | ZU_09 | Getty Images

original Greek language.

In Chapter 5, the word used is “scroll” but “little scroll” is used in chapter 10. It is now understood that both words in the original Greek at that time period were used interchangeably for the one book.

We find there are some strong connecting links between the books mentioned in Chapter 5 and Chapter 10:

1. Chapter 5:2 reveals a “mighty angel” issuing a proclamation regarding the finding of one who is worthy to open the book.

Chapter 10:1 states: “I saw another mighty angel...” This seems to make a literary connection between the two angels and the books.

2. The fact that all the seals of the scroll are now removed before the angel of chapter 10 appears with the open scroll and makes his proclamation is also of significance.
3. John’s use of the Old Testament experience of Ezekiel gives further significance. Ezekiel had a vision of the throne of God (Chapter 1) and was then commissioned to take a prophetic

message to the people (chapters 2 and 3), symbolised by eating a book that was sweet in his mouth (see Ezekiel 3:1-3). But when he was warned the people would reject it, it produced bitterness in his own life (Ezekiel 3:14).

Likewise, John had a vision of the throne of God in chapters 4 and 5, but the message of the book is inside a book, which is sealed in the hand of a mighty angel (see Revelation 5:1). It is only after the Lamb has unsealed the message of the book that another mighty angel is able to take the message from heaven to earth (see Revelation 10:1, 2), where John also eats the scroll. This is followed by bitterness.

4. The description of the angel in Chapter 10 is more detailed than any other angel in Revelation. It would seem this angel is uniquely important. If this is matched alongside the opening words of Chapter 1:1, which states the message of Revelation came from God to Jesus, who gave it to an angel who gave it to John, then we have a clearer picture of the opening words of the book:

- God did have the message found in a scroll (see Revelation 5:1).

- Jesus the Lamb does get this scroll from the hand of God (see Revelation 5:7).
- Jesus opens it by removing the seals (see Chapter 6 and 8:1) and then passes it on to the angel, who comes to John with the now-open scroll (see Revelation 10:8).

This would explain why John can conclude his book by saying: "I, Jesus have sent my angel to give you testimony for the churches" (Revelation 22:16).

This statement is due to the special message John has to bring to the churches as a result of receiving the message of the scroll, which concerns the finishing up of the gospel message being preached to the world (see Revelation 10:7) and the reaction those who proclaim it will face from those who reject it.

It is a message sweet to those who accept it but as they preach it, they will face bitter consequences.

This establishes the context for the second half of Revelation and leads directly into the next chapter about the two witnesses being put to death.

Why the Angel Speaks with a Lion's Voice

In Revelation 10:2, 3, we see the proclamation is so large that the angel plants one foot on the land and the other on the sea, and shouts with the voice of a lion. In Old Testament language, God's voice is likened to a lion while Jesus is described as the lion of the tribe of Judah. From this we know the angel represents Jesus with a message for His people.

When the angel speaks, the seven thunders also speak—another Old Testament representation for God’s voice. In Psalm 29:3-9, the seven-fold voice of God is referred to as “the voice of thunder”. This reference would have been familiar to Christians in John’s day. In John 12:28-30, the voice of God sounded like thunder to those who heard it.

Notes:

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Even as people receive the good news about Jesus today it brings sweetness | Gospel Perspective | Lightstock

11

So What did God Say? We Don't Know.

Because in Revelation 10:4, John is told to seal it up. The Book of Revelation is an open book but this section was not relevant to John's time and those who read it then. The message John is not allowed to write seems to be a divine forewarning of what is going to happen in the end time.

The Final Gospel Proclamation

In Revelation 10:5-7, we find a powerful message from the Creator Himself. He is the One who made the heavens and the earth and all that is in them (see Genesis 1 and 2). No longer is He going to allow the creatures He created to carry on in their rebellion. He has heard the cries of His people, as recorded in the fifth seal (Revelation 6:9-11): "How long, Sovereign Lord, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" God is now answering them; the last-day events will begin to unfold.

What we are reading here is connected with accomplishing the mystery of God (see Revelation 10:7). Ephesians 3:3-7 and Colossians 1:26, 27 make it clear that the gospel is the mystery of God.

From now on, Revelation majors in the

finishing of the gospel message on earth. It tells us there will be a great final proclamation of the gospel taking place just before the blowing of the last trumpet. Jesus said when this happens, the end will come.

How God's Great Mystery Works

The mystery is how God can take any person and accept them. He accepts—and changes—the most hopeless of us. It's a mystery why He even bothers. It's a mystery why Christ would come and die. And it remains a mystery to those who are unbelievers and outside the covenant.

But it will be revealed even to them when the scene described in Revelation 20:11-15 takes place and all the human family are alive at the one time. They—along with the demonic

forces and the rest of the universe—will be witnesses to all that God has been doing. Paul spoke of a time when God “will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts” (1 Corinthians 4:5).

But when the good news is proclaimed, there are consequences. There are many who will resist. All the powers of evil will be mustered against God's "mystery."

The crucial element in this passage is a clear allusion to Daniel 12: 4-7. When the angel of Revelation 10:5-6 says, "Time will be no more" he is speaking about chronological time and referring the reader back to Daniel 12:7, where the angel says "Time, times and half a time" at the same point. The "time" that will be "no more" refers back to the time prophecies of Daniel, 2300 evenings and mornings (Daniel 8:13-14), time, times and half a time (Daniel 12:7 = 1,260 days), 1,290 days (Daniel 12:11) and 1,335 days (Daniel 12:12).

While many of these time periods are difficult to understand one thing is clear, John envisions a final period of earth's history after the close of Daniel's time prophecies. During that final time period, which Daniel calls the Time of the End (Daniel 11:40; 12:9), the final

proclamation of the gospel goes forth. This final time period is the major focus of the rest of the book of Revelation.

Eating the Scroll

▷ Read Revelation 10:8-11

Eating is a way of describing the message from God and proclaiming it to the people (see Ezekiel 2:8-3:9). Prophets often act out their prophecies; John's disappointment is expressed in this acted parable. He saw his book would not bring the end. But he knew prophecy written in his book would be heard again by means of other people at the end time (see Revelation 10:11).

Within the context of Revelation 10:5-7, John's experience is also a forecast of another disappointment at the close of Daniel's time prophecies. In 1844 a group of people thought the end would come but it didn't. To have their hopes of Jesus' return raised and dashed would be a bitter experience anytime for God's faithful people. *(Read the Special Interest Topic connecting Revelation 10 with the book of Daniel.)*

So it will be again. John—personifying God's people—takes the book and eats it.

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Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss | Design Pics | Getty Images

The Proof is in the Eating

The good news is it's sweet—Sweet like honey. Jesus accepts sinners! The contents of this book is available free of charge. It brings joy to the heart. It gives confidence to put up with the disappointments in life. It gives confidence to face growing old. It gives confidence to face death, because Jesus conquered death. Because He lives, we know we can live forever. This is so sweet in the mouth.

What is to be preached? The gospel to all the world, just as Jesus said. This is the mystery of God to be revealed.

There will be a final proclamation of the everlasting gospel before the end comes (see Revelation 14:6-12). It will go to every nation, tribe, language and people. Jesus also said in His sermon this would happen in His sermon (see Matthew 24:14).

But when we share the good news, some will not appreciate our efforts. Some people will think we are strange. Many do not want to hear it and can become angry.

As with Ezekiel's experience, there is a sour reaction: Israel did not want to hear. Revelation 11 speaks about the fate of the two witnesses, which links with the bitterness of eating the scroll. We will see just how bitter this is when the contents of the scroll are revealed. The message found in the

open scroll contains the good news but the preaching of it can bring hard times.

But John, who personifies God's people, is told to "prophesy [preach] again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings" (see Revelation 10:11).

The Chain of Transmission Remains Unbroken

With the conclusion of Revelation 10, the chain of transmission from Revelation 1 is concluded. The revelation began with God the Father. He hands it on to Jesus in the form of a sealed scroll. Jesus passes it on to John through an angel. Now, John is going to reveal its contents in Revelation 12 to 22.

These chapters deal with the final events of world history. Their purpose is to prepare God's people for these events. They will be tempted to think God has forsaken them, so they need to understand there is a purpose behind all the puzzling things that are going to happen.

During the final events of world history the church will be facing its Calvary as it follows in the footsteps of Christ.

At this time, the church will preach the true gospel. But it will also be called upon to expose what is false. The world will be brought to a test between true and false religion.

Looking Ahead to the End-Time Experiences of the Followers of Jesus in Chapter 11

John uses the language of the events during Jesus' last days to describe the experiences of His followers during the end time. By understanding the way Jesus was betrayed and condemned through religious and civil

powers uniting, we get a clearer indication of how the followers of Jesus will be treated.

In the next session, we will see how Revelation 11 concludes the first half of the book and introduces the second half, like an overture to the rest of the symphony.

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