

Series Revelation

Scripture #16 Revelation 10

You have been very brave to journey with me through the book of Revelation, especially since we have gotten into the scary parts. The primary theme of the book is the sovereignty of God. This has been emphasized in the texts in several ways. Very early in chapter 1 we were introduced to “him who is, and who was, and who is to come” (*Revelation 1:4*). This description drew our attention to the fact that the God of the present time is the same God who was in control of the past and will be in control of the future.

Also in chapter 1 God the Father declared Himself to be “the Alpha and the Omega,” the “beginning and the end” (*Revelation 1:8, 21:6*). Jesus applied this title to Himself, and further declared that He was “the First and the Last” (*Revelation 1:17, 22:13*). These terms call attention to the fact that the Father and the Son existed before anything else and will be present at the end of all things.

The sovereignty of God is also indicated by one of His titles. The term, “the Almighty” (*Revelation 1:8*) occurs nine times in the book, often in the compound form “Lord God Almighty.” This highlights the omnipotence of God and His authority to rule over everything in creation.

As events have progressed through the chapters, we have read numerous verses which point to God’s control of events. For example, in chapter 6 God gave permission for the rider on the white horse to be a conqueror, the rider on the red horse to take peace from the earth, the rider on the pale horse to kill one fourth of the population of the earth by sword, famine, plague, and wild beasts.

God’s sovereign control is also recognized in the release of the demonic hordes, which we read about last week. Certain demonic forces are being kept bound under lock and key until the specific hour and day and month and year when God will give permission for their release. God will utilize the evil desires of these creatures to accomplish His purposes, but it will be on His terms, and in His time, not theirs.

The book of Revelation emphasizes that every aspect of God's creation is under God's control and authority and functions only by His permission, not only the actions of people, but even the actions of the forces of evil.

There is one more noteworthy indicator of the sovereignty of God. He is frequently described as "on His throne." The throne room scenes call attention to God's majesty and splendor, and His dominion over heaven and earth. The word "throne" appears 46 times in the book, often in conjunction with upcoming significant happenings.

We have recently thought about six of the trumpet judgments. The 5th and 6th judgments in the series, which were described in chapter 9, were uniquely severe and frightening because they described the direct involvement of demonic forces. These forces were given permission to kill a third of mankind, and to do this in painful, tortuous ways. However, there was a merciful aspect to these judgments. "The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues" had the opportunity to repent. Unfortunately, the verses at the end of chapter 9 stated: "they did not repent of the works of their hands, nor did they stop worshiping demons and idols, ... nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality, or their thefts" (*Revelation 9:20-21*).

The 6th trumpet judgment represented the last opportunity that unbelievers had in the present age to repent and get right with God. This will be brought out in today's reading.

Read Revelation 10:1-11

The verses which preceded our reading described trumpet judgment number 6, so we might have expected this chapter to describe the 7th trumpet judgment. However, I want you to be aware of a pattern in the writing of this book. There are interludes inserted after the 6th judgment in each series. After the first six seals were opened in chapter 6, there was an interlude in which John saw the sealing of the 144,000 followed by a second vision of the heavenly multitude of saints.

This pattern repeats in chapters 10 and 11. Instead of the immediate sounding of the 7th trumpet, there is another interlude in which John sees two more visions. We are going to think about the first of these two visions today.

Some commentators think of chapters 10 and 11 as digressions, descriptions which are completely out of the main flow of information. Actually these interludes are literary devices utilized by God and John by which special instructions are given to the Church about its role and destiny during the final period of world history. The series of seal and trumpet judgments described the impact of the judgments on the nations of the world. The interludes describe the impact on the people of God.

In view of the horrible things which will occur during the 5th and 6th seal and trumpet judgments, God wants to encourage His people. Believers will face increasing hostility and persecution near the end of the age, just as the conditions for unbelievers will become increasingly terrible. Hence, John was given visions which would speak to the needs of God's people.

Let me remind you of two important truths concerning the circumstances of believers at the end of the age. First, believers will be sealed in some special way so that they will not have to face the wrath of God. God's wrath will be directed only to unbelievers. However, this special protection from God does not mean that believers will be exempt from the hostility of unbelievers. God expects His people to be faithful to Him and to be obedient to His Word as long as they have breath. They are to be faithful even to death.

The second truth is that several events in this book happen at the same time. As I have illustrated in the diagram/outline, there are overlaps in the different historical sweeps during this present Church Age. It is likely that chapter 10 describes an event that will occur before the 5th trumpet judgment.

There are two main purposes for chapter 10. The first is the announcement in verse 7, "in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished." The second main purpose is to recommission John for his continued prophetic writings.

John saw a "mighty angel coming down from heaven." This angel was dressed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his feet were like pillars of fire. Some commentators assume this angel is Jesus because many aspects of his appearance are similar to the description of Jesus in chapter 1. However, this is unlikely. Jesus is never described as an angel in this book. Furthermore, this angel serves as a messenger. He does not have the rank of deity, and John does not worship him.

Apparently, this angel was colossal in size. He placed one foot upon the sea and the other foot upon the land. This would be symbolic of heavenly authority over the entire earth. The symbolic stance of the angel was significant to John because he mentioned it three times (*in verses 2, 5, 8*).

Why verses 3 and 4 are included in this vision is puzzling. John reported that the angel shouted loudly, and that there was a response from heaven. John heard the voices of the seven thunders. He understood and was about to write what they said but another more authoritative voice forbade him, instructing him instead to “seal up” or “hide” the words of the seven thunders.

The only explanation I can give for verses 3 and 4 is that there are some things about the purposes and activities of God that we must not know in this life. The lampstands, seals, and trumpet judgments all have informed us in a limited way about the future, but God, because He is God, works in ways and with principles that are beyond our human comprehension. There are a couple of Old Testament verses which apply here: God said, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (*Isaiah 55:8-9*).

The Bible does not give us detailed information about the end of the world. This implies that we must stay within the boundaries of what has been revealed to us. What we have is like the visible portion of an iceberg. What can be seen is only a small part of the total mass of the iceberg. Most of it is hidden from sight. The same is true of the Word of God. The Bible provides sufficient revelation for salvation and godly living, but it is not an exhaustive revelation of the future.

O. K. Now back to the angel. The angel raised his hand and swore an oath on the authority of “him who lives for ever and ever, the One who created the heavens ... and the earth ... and the sea, and all that is in them.” To base an oath on the eternal Creator is to appeal to the ultimate authority.

When Americans appear in court, they place one hand on a Bible, raise their other hand, and promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. This is essentially what the angel did.

The truth about which the angel solemnly swore is that the period of delay is over. With the sounding of the 7th trumpet God's commitment to redeem fallen humanity will be brought to completion. The purposes of God are referred to as the "mystery of God." In the Bible, a "mystery" is a divine truth which is revealed only to insiders. Unbelievers are not eligible to receive such truth, but only those who are members of God's family. Jesus spoke of the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (*Matthew 13*). The Apostle Paul wrote about the mystery of the Church as the Body of Christ (*Ephesians 3:1-11*). There are 11 mentions of these "mysteries" in Scripture.

The "mystery of God" in this chapter concerns His initiative and efforts to bring sinful humans back into relationship with Himself. Restoration became possible through the crucifixion of Jesus, but the plan originated before creation. This process of restoration includes both the eradication of evil and the ultimate salvation of believers. This process will be completed with the establishment of new heavens and new earth and the dwelling of God with His people.

Notice that the 7th trumpet judgment will span a period of time. Verse 7 states, "in the days," not "day," of the sounding of the 7th trumpet. This suggests that the 7th trumpet judgment will not be a one-time event. It will embody a period of time and numerous events. We will, in fact, find in a later chapter that the 7th trumpet judgment will introduce another series of 7 judgments.

The angel's statement about "no more delay" means that God will not give people further opportunity to repent. With the sounding of the 7th trumpet, the events of the end will be irrevocably set in motion.

Also notice the statement: "the mystery of God will be accomplished just as he announced to his servants the prophets." The prophets in the Old Testament had the dual responsibility to warn sinners that their behavior had consequences and to encourage the true followers of God to be faithful. The prophet Amos described God's patience and mercy with these words, "Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets" (*Amos 3:7*).

John was a 1st Century prophet. Just like his predecessors in the Old Testament, it was his responsibility to warn unbelievers about their lack of faith and the consequences of sinful behaviors and to encourage believers. This book is God's advance announcement, because "He does nothing without revealing his plans to his servants the prophets."

And that leads us into the second of the main themes in this chapter, verses 8 through 11. In an earlier verse we were informed that the angel had an open scroll in his hand. John was instructed to take this scroll. As he was doing so, he was instructed by the angel to eat it. John was warned that the scroll would “turn his stomach sour” even though it would taste like honey in his mouth, and that was exactly his experience.

John did not write about the contents of the scroll, but the contents can be deduced from the experience of an Old Testament prophet and from the command given in verse 11. When God selected Ezekiel to be His prophet to the rebellious Israelites, He gave him a scroll which had “words of lament and mourning and woe” written on both sides. Ezekiel was commanded to eat the scroll and fill his stomach. Ezekiel reported that “it tasted as sweet as honey in his mouth” (*Ezekiel 2:1-3:3*).

Then God commanded Ezekiel to go speak with the “house of Israel.” He was to speak the words of the Sovereign LORD “whether they listened to him or not” (*Ezekiel 3:11*). Ezekiel reported that the Spirit “lifted him up and took him away” to begin his preaching and that he “went in bitterness and in the anger of his spirit” (*Ezekiel 3:14*).

I’m certain that John recognized that he was repeating Ezekiel’s experience. John was being reaffirmed in his on-going role as the prophet of God. He had the responsibility to continue to “prophesy about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings.” In view of the ominous information that God was yet to reveal to John, John needed encouragement and reassurance.

God gives His prophets words of judgment as well as mercy, and the messenger of the gospel must be faithful to both aspects of the message. The proclamation of divine judgment and the wrath of God is never satisfying to the person who knows the love of God and desires that unbelievers respond to that love. All of the Biblical prophets had broken hearts, heavy burdens, bitter spirits. Jesus Himself had these feelings — He wept over Jerusalem because the people had rejected Him and His message (*Luke 19:41; Matthew 23:37-38*).

Prophets experience the sweetness of being close to God and being the recipient of God’s Word (*See Psalm 19:10; 119:103*). However, after digesting the messages given to them by God and pondering the implications, the prophet gets heartburn.

Knowledge of God's sovereign will is sweet. John knew that God's people would be vindicated and rewarded for their faithful obedience. On the other hand, such knowledge was bitter to John because he understood how much suffering and persecution that God's people would experience. He knew that many would be killed. He knew that the power of evil would be at its greatest level just before the end of the age.

In the context of this interlude section, the little scroll was primarily a message for the believing Church. It might seem strange that believers would find encouragement in a message about fierce Satanic opposition and earthly hostility. The fact is that believers need to see beyond the physical pain and inconveniences and very real threats of martyrdom to the final triumph. The prospect of no further delay in the fulfillment of God's eternal purposes is good news for the Church even though in the near term the members of the Church will go through a difficult, bitter period.

Chapter 10 reminds us of the sovereignty of God and of His ultimate victory over the forces of evil. While we as believers anticipate God's ultimate victory over the evil that is around us, we must, at the same time, recognize that conditions in the coming years will become more and more difficult. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ need to remember the admonition given throughout Revelation: "To him who overcomes, who is faithful even unto death, I will give the crown of life."

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